

BIBLE STUDY NOTES

Volume Four



Daniel in the Lion's Den and Habbacuc

BIBLE STUDY NOTES

Volume Four

ISAIAH

JEREMIAH

EZEKIEL

DANIEL

JOEL

AMOS

JONAH

MICAH

HAGGAI

ZECHARIAH

MALACHI

MATTHEW

*by Anita S. Dole
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INTRODUCTORY NOTES FOR TEACHERS

As we may see by the accompanying chart, this program was planned as a four-year Bible course, but it was originally arranged so that the whole Word was covered by periods each year, in order that the child might early realize that the Bible is one book—not only a continuous story but a completed one—and also that children might not so often enter the Sunday School for the first time in the middle of the Bible story with no idea of what has gone before. While this plan might in any one year seem to leave many important stories untouched, the retelling of the background of the successive periods from year to year in the context of different stories built up gradually in the child's mind both a surer knowledge and a better understanding of the whole letter of the Word. The plan insured that the beginning of the Bible story was not forgotten before the end was reached, and that the Old and New Testaments were seen in their proper relation and proportion. Although the lessons are now arranged in Bible sequence, it is still possible, by using the chart, to use the original four-year plan.

The notes for the various age groups are written with two purposes in view. It is *not* intended that the teacher should read them to the class. Neither is it intended that copies should be given out to the pupils in advance. Only the Bible reading should be done in advance. For the teacher, the notes are meant to suggest the points to be covered in the lesson, a possible order of presentation, and the general level of meaning which pupils in the particular age group may be expected to comprehend. For the pupil, if he has his own set of the books, they are meant to be taken home, read as a review during the week, and preserved for future reference.

It is very important that the teacher plan his use of the class time carefully. Five minutes or less at the beginning of the period are enough for review questions. Then give five minutes to a carefully thought-out covering of the background of the lesson for the day before going into the lesson proper. In the Old Testament

build the background as far as possible about persons and places in order to fix these in their proper sequence in the pupils' minds. In the New Testament the background should be the factual story of the Lord's life on earth.

The writings of the church tell us that "generals" must be grasped before "particulars" can be understood in their proper context; so we may feel sure that our first object in the Sunday School should be to impress the general outline of the whole Bible story on the minds of our pupils. The covering of the whole story each year has this objective in view.

The two survey lessons (nos. 22 and 24 on the accompanying chart) are general lessons but are based on a different passage each year in order to give the pupils a wider variety in the study of the Prophets than has been possible in previous courses. They are also optional lessons, written in such a way that Sunday Schools with a school year of less than forty sessions may omit them without losing continuity. Each series also contains fifteen lessons from the New Testament. A different Gospel is studied each year. Two of the fifteen lessons are written as optional lessons; three are the special lessons for Christmas, Palm Sunday, and Easter; and three are from the book of Revelation.

FOUR-YEAR LESSON COURSE FOR NEW CHURCH SUNDAY SCHOOLS

x

Assignments in the Old Testament

<i>Lesson</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Series I</i>	<i>Series II</i>	<i>Series III</i>	<i>Series IV</i>
1.	The Creation	General View	First Four Days	Days Five and Six	The Seventh Day
2.	The Most Ancient Church	The Garden of Eden	Helpmeet for Adam	The Serpent	Cain and Abel
3.	The Ancient Church	Noah Builds an Ark	End of the Flood	The Rainbow	Tower of Babel
4.	Abraham	The Call of Abram	Abram and Lot	Birth of Ishmael	Abraham & the Angels
5.	Isaac	Birth of Isaac	Sacrifice of Isaac	Isaac and Rebekah	Isaac & Abimelech
6.	Jacob	Jacob & Esau	Jacob's Dream	Wives & Sons	Jacob's Return
7.	Joseph	Joseph & Brothers	Joseph in Prison	Ruler of Egypt	Sons and Death
8.	Moses	Birth of Moses	The Burning Bush	The Ten Plagues	The Passover
9.	Escape from Egypt	Crossing Red Sea	Marah & Elim	Quails and Manna	Rephidim & Amalek
10.	Mount Sinai	Ten Commandments	Ark of Covenant	The Tabernacle	The Golden Calf
11.	Wilderness Wanderings	Nadab & Abihu	The Twelve Spies	Korah, Dathan, Abiram	Aaron's Rod
12.	Entering the Holy Land	Balaam	Call of Joshua	Crossing the Jordan	Gilgal
13.	Conquest of Holy Land	Jericho	Ai	The Gibeonites	Conquest & Division
14.	The Judges	Deborah & Barak	Gideon	Jephthah	Samson
15.	Samuel	Birth of Samuel	Lord Calls Samuel	Capture of the Ark	Asking for a King
16.	Saul	Choosing of Saul	Saul's Impatience	Saul & Jonathan	Sparing Agag
17.	David	Anointing of David	David & Goliath	Ark to Jerusalem	David & Bathsheba
18.	Solomon	Wisdom of Solomon	Glory of Solomon	Building the Temple	Decline & Death
19.	Kingdom of Israel	Elijah & Ahab	Elijah at Horeb	Elijah's Mantle	Elisha & Naaman
20.	Kingdom of Judah	Reign of Asa	Hezekiah & Isaiah	Josiah	Zedekiah & Jeremiah
21.	Book of Psalms	Psalm 1	Psalm 19	Psalm 91	Psalm 119

*22. Major Prophets—Survey	Isaiah 6	Jeremiah 1	Ezekiel 47:1-12	Daniel 5
23. Major Prophets	Fiery Furnace	Ezekiel's Vision	Daniel & the Image	Daniel & the Lions
*24. Minor Prophets—Survey	Micah 6	Joel 3:9-21	Amos 8	Zechariah 4
25. Minor Prophets	Haggai 1; 2	Jonah & the Fish	Malachi 3; 4	Jonah & the Gourd

Assignments in the New Testament

<i>Lesson</i>	<i>Series I</i>	<i>Series II</i>	<i>Series III</i>	<i>Series IV</i>
26.	Matthew 1:18-25; 2:13-23	Mark 1	Luke 1	John 1
27.	Matthew 3	Mark 2	Luke 7:1-30	John 2:1-11
28.	Matthew 4:1-11	*Mark 3	Luke 9:1-36	*John 3:1-21
29.	*Matthew 4:12-25	*Mark 4	Luke 10:25-42	John 4:1-42
30.	Matthew 5; 6; 7	Mark 5	*Luke 11	John 5:1-16
31.	Matthew 8	Mark 6	Luke 14	John 9
32.	*Matthew 13	Mark 10	Luke 15	*John 10
33.	Matthew 17:1-13	Mark 14	*Luke 16	John 11:1-46
34.	Matthew 26; 27	Mark 15	Luke 24:13-53	John 15
35.	Revelation 1	Revelation 4	Revelation 6	Revelation 12
36.	Revelation 2; 3	Revelation 5	Revelation 8; 9	Revelation 13; 19:11-21
37.	Revelation 21; 22	Revelation 20:11-15; 21:1-7	Revelation 21:9-16	Revelation 22:8-21

Special Lessons

Christmas	Matthew 2:1-15	Luke 2:1-20	Matthew 2:1-15	Luke 2:1-20
Palm Sunday	Matthew 21:1-27	Mark 11	Luke 19	John 12:12-50
Easter	Matthew 28	Mark 16	Luke 24:1-12	John 20; 21

*Optional Lessons

BIBLE STUDY NOTES

Isaiah

Jeremiah

Ezekiel

Daniel

Joel

Amos

Jonah

Micah

Haggai

Zechariah

Malachi

Matthew

THE MAJOR PROPHETS

Isaiah 6

What follows is some factual information concerning the four Major Prophets taken from an earlier New Church publication, *Our Heavenly Father's Book* by William B. Hayden.

Isaiah was the son of Amoz, and lived at Jerusalem, where he had his visions and wrote his prophecies, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. He is supposed to have been born about the thirtieth year of King Uzziah's reign, or about seven hundred and eighty years B.C., and to have survived until the early part of the reign of Manasseh, or to about B.C. six hundred and ninety-five . . . His ministry as a prophet extends over a period of about sixty years. At different portions of his career he was contemporary with the prophets (minor) Amos, Hosea, Joel, and Micah . . . The book is usually regarded in three grand divisions. 1, The prophecies contained in the first thirty-five chapters. 2, The historical account of King Hezekiah, in chapters xxxvi to xxxix. 3, The series of prophecies beginning with chapter xl and occupying the remainder of the book . . . On account of certain allusions in it [this third part] to historical events which happened later than the lifetime of Isaiah, some critics conjecture that this part must have been written and added afterwards by some other author, called by them the "unknown prophet." This however is contrary to the uniform testimony of ancient tradition. It is alleged that these allusions to events then future, were by prophetic prediction. All the references also to it in the New Testament speak of Isaiah as the author of this portion. But to know who the human writer was, is not very important for us.

Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, a priest, and was born at Anathoth, in the land of Benjamin, about four miles north of Jerusalem, where his family had landed possessions . . . Unlike most of the other prophets, he gives us many particulars of his personal history. His youth was passed in his native town, where, while still quite a young man, he was called to the prophetical office, and where, apparently on account of his Divine call, he was subjected to bitter persecutions . . . His first appearance was about one hundred and thirty years after that of Isaiah, and some seventy or more after the latest of Isaiah's prophecies. He exercised his office for a period of about forty-one years in his native land, under five successive kings of Judah—Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah—and after that, late in life, he prophesied in Egypt.

Ezekiel was carried into captivity with Jehoiachin and the chief of the people, in the eleventh year before the destruction of Jerusalem, B.C. 599, into Mesopotamia, where the captives formed a colony by the River Chaboras (Chebar), a branch of the Euphrates. He had a house at Tel-abib, and was married. In the fifth year of his exile he began to prophesy, B.C. 593, and continued in that office till at least the sixteenth year after the destruction of Jerusalem, or upwards of twenty-two years. He was highly esteemed by his companions in exile, and the elders of the people applied to him for counsel. How long he survived, is uncertain. There is reason to believe that he did not continue all his life at the original place of exile, but removed, towards the close of it, to his fellow-countrymen in the Province of Babylon, where he probably died a natural death. In the middle ages his tomb was still shown at Kefel, some distance from Bagdad, and visited by numbers of Jews and Christians . . . He was in part contemporary with Daniel.

Daniel belonged to the royal family of Judah, being one "of the king's seed and of the princes" whom Nebuchadnezzar carried captive to Babylon the third year of King Jehoiachim, 604 B.C. . . . He was the only Hebrew prophet who attained great worldly prosperity. His great powers, spotless life, and peculiar gifts, won him the royal favor, which he retained under successive monarchs.

Doctrinal Points

Humility before the Lord and willingness to serve Him at whatever cost to oneself are necessary if one is to draw genuine truth from the Word.

Notes for Parents

In our Bible there are seventeen books, beginning with Isaiah and ending with Malachi, which we call the Prophets. We divide these into the Major and the Minor Prophets, not because some are more important than others, but because the books of the Major Prophets are much longer than the others. There are four Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Jeremiah also wrote the book which is called Lamentations.

Isaiah prophesied in the kingdom of Judah during the reigns of four kings, the greatest of whom was Hezekiah. Jeremiah also

prophesied in Judah, but later than Isaiah. He prophesied during the last years of that kingdom and also after Judah was taken captive by Babylon, although Jeremiah himself was not carried away to Babylon. In his old age, his people took him against his will to Egypt, where he wrote the book of Lamentations. Ezekiel and Daniel were carried away by the Babylonians before they became prophets, and they prophesied in exile.

The book of Isaiah contains many familiar and beautiful passages, especially prophecies of the Lord's Advent, and is referred to frequently in the New Testament. In the Greek of the New Testament [KJV] the Hebrew name *Isaiah* becomes *Esaias*.

Our special assignment for today is the story of Isaiah's call by the Lord. The words which the prophets spoke were not their own, but were dictated to them by the Lord, and our story shows us some of the qualities which must be found in a man if he is to become a true servant of the Lord. First he must recognize the Lord. It is easy to understand that the Lord cannot be represented in the world by an unbeliever. Then he must be humble and conscious of his own shortcomings. If we are full of self-satisfaction, we will not even listen to the Lord ourselves. And finally he must be willing to serve the Lord. We should all want to do the Lord's work in the world and should always be ready, when opportunity comes, to say as Isaiah did: "Here am I; send me."

The cleansing of Isaiah's lips by the live coal from the altar is a beautiful picture of what a touch of the Lord's unselfish love does for our lives. Just think how much of our wrongdoing and how much of our unhappiness can be directly traced to our own selfishness! It is when we are not thinking of ourselves at all, when we are eagerly trying to help someone else, to bring happiness to some other person, that we are happy and at peace ourselves. And it is then that we can be truly useful to the Lord.

The mission of the prophets was twofold. They pointed out the evils of their times, warning men of the inevitable results of wrongdoing, and they encouraged the good by assuring them of the Lord's protection and help and of their final happiness.

THE MAJOR PROPHETS

And the prophets whose prophecies were, under divine providence, recorded in the Word of God are sent to us, to everyone in all times. Through the books of the Prophets the Lord is speaking to us. Let us not be like those whose ears were made heavy and whose eyes were shut.

Primary

Concentrate on Isaiah's vision, which gives even the little children a vivid picture to hold in mind. They should learn if possible the names of the four books known as the Major Prophets and should know what the mission of a prophet was. In describing the vision, point out especially Isaiah's humility and his willingness to be used by the Lord as soon as he was assured that he was made worthy.

Do you know what a prophet is?

A prophet is one who speaks for the Lord.

The Lord has always sent prophets to speak for Him.

They told the people what they were doing that was wrong.

They told them what would happen to them if they did not change.

They also told them what was right and how happy they would be if they did right.

Do you remember the great prophet Elijah who built the altar to the Lord, and how the Lord sent down fire from heaven on Elijah's altar to show the people that Elijah's God was the true God? Elijah was a prophet in the kingdom of Israel.

The Lord used some of these prophets to write books which are in our Bible. The prophets did not make up their books out of their own heads. The Lord told them just what words to write. So you see the Lord Himself is really speaking to us when we read the books of the Prophets.

Sixteen of the books of our Bible are called by the names of prophets.

There are four long books and twelve short ones.

The four are called the Major Prophets and the twelve the Minor Prophets.

The prophet Jeremiah also wrote the book of Lamentations.

Can you remember the names of the four Major Prophets?

Our story today is about how Isaiah was called to be the Lord's prophet. Isaiah did not prophesy in Israel, as Elijah did. He was

sent to the kingdom of Judah, and he prophesied during the reigns of four of the kings of Judah.

What did he see first in his vision?

Can you tell something about the seraphim who were above the throne of the Lord?

Why did Isaiah feel himself to be unworthy?

What did the seraph do for him?

Do you remember what he said when the Lord asked, "Whom shall I send?" Are you always eager to do the things your parents ask you to do? If you are not, try next time to remember Isaiah.

Junior

These children will be interested in some of the historical data regarding the four prophets. It is a good time to show them on a map the relative positions of the great Bible countries: Canaan, Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. Have them look up the Bible references mentioned in their notes. They can also get something of the meaning of Isaiah's vision.

Into what two great parts is the Bible divided?

Jews today, as long ago, use only the first part, the Old Testament. They divide the Old Testament into three parts: the Law, the Prophets, and the Sacred Writings. The Law is the first five books, the books of Moses. The Prophets are grouped in two parts, the former and the latter prophets. Under the former prophets are the books which we usually think of as the historical books: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. They were, of course, all written through prophets just as much as the later ones. The latter prophets are the ones we usually think of as the prophets, the last books of the Old Testament from Isaiah through Malachi, except that the Jews do not group the books of Lamentations and Daniel with the prophets but put them with eleven other books in a section called the Kethubim or Sacred Writings, which they do not consider as of equal inspiration with the Law and the Prophets. You may like to remember that the New Church accepts the Hebrew "canon" or measure of the Word in the Old Testament with the addition of

the books of Psalms, Lamentations, and Daniel. Someday you will learn the reasons behind this acceptance.

We think of the first four of the books which are called by the name of individual prophets as the *Major Prophets* and the others as the *Minor Prophets*. Major means greater and minor lesser, but this has reference only to the length of these books. All the prophets are of equal importance. The four Major Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Jeremiah was a prophet in Judah under its last five kings before the captivity and continued to prophesy in Egypt after the people of Judah were carried away to Babylon; he wrote the book of Lamentations in Egypt. Ezekiel and Daniel were among those carried away from Judah. Ezekiel prophesied in Mesopotamia, where he lived near the river Chebar, and Daniel prophesied in Babylon. Our lesson today is about Isaiah.

In the time of what kings did Isaiah live?

Whom did Isaiah see in vision?

What did he see above the Lord's throne?

Why was he afraid?

Read Exodus 30:20, 33:20. He recognized that he and all the people had sinned, and he thought that the vision must cause his death.

How were his lips cleansed?

Fire from the altar is a picture of pure unselfish love from the Lord. It was the touch of this divine love which would make Isaiah worthy to speak the Lord's words.

Once Isaiah felt that he was purified, he was ready to serve the Lord. Sometimes we know there are things we ought to do, but we think of how hard they are and we hang back. Isaiah, knowing the sins of the people, knew that he would be called upon to say many hard things to them. The prophets never had an easy time. So it took real courage to say, "Here am I; send me." This is the kind of courage we must develop if we are to be found worthy to bring to others the message the Lord has given the world in His Second Coming.

Intermediate

The Intermediates will be interested in the correspondence of the details of the vision. The principles suggested by these details will make good discussion material. The lesson of humility and willingness to serve is especially needed.

The books of the Prophets are not arranged in the Bible exactly in their historical order. Of the four Major Prophets the first two prophesied in the Holy Land—Jeremiah also wrote the book of Lamentations in Egypt after the captivity of Judah—and the last two prophesied from captivity outside the land. The ancient Hebrews did not recognize either the book of Lamentations or the book of Daniel as part of the inspired Word because they were not written in the Holy Land. They did include Ezekiel, probably because he says frequently that he was “carried in the spirit to Jerusalem” and much of his prophecy concerns the visions that he had at these times. Isaiah and Jeremiah, writing during the last years of the kingdom of Judah, were both subject to persecution because they were called to rebuke the people and to prophesy doom, and this is never popular. Daniel and Ezekiel both prospered in captivity. Ezekiel was looked up to by the other exiles, who listened gladly to his visions and looked to him for counsel. Daniel was one of the young men specially trained as advisers to the king of Babylon and was advanced to high position, holding favor with successive kings because of his ability to interpret dreams and to advise wisely and because of the miraculous protection which he received from the Lord.

The book of the prophet Isaiah, from which our present lesson is taken, is one of the longer books of the Bible and contains many verses familiar to us, and because we read of Isaiah in connection with King Hezekiah in the second book of Kings, he stands out in our minds as an individual. The varieties of study in the book and the fact that in the last twenty-seven chapters events are described which took place after Isaiah's time have led critics to assume that the book must have been written by several authors rather than by one, but tradition and the testimony of the New Testament support Isaiah's authorship. Believing as we do that the Lord is the author

of the inspired Scriptures throughout, the identity of the human penmen is of comparatively minor importance; yet we should be careful not to accept without thought the theories of scholars who begin their study of the Bible with the premise that it is, like other books, merely the work of men. If one starts out on the wrong road, the farther he travels the farther he may get from his true destination.

Our chapter, which describes Isaiah's call, gives us both in the letter and in its internal meaning a clear picture of what is required of one who would speak for the Lord. There must first be a "seeing" of the Lord; Isaiah's vision of the Lord sitting upon the throne is, like John's [Revelation 1], the recognition that the Lord is the truth and that His truth must reign. The seraphim with six wings picture the power of divine truth to protect the inner character (the face) and the conduct (the feet) and to lift one's thoughts above the material level.

Isaiah's first reaction to this vision was fear because of his own unworthiness, another essential for a true prophet. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." [Psalm 111:10] The coal from the altar with which the seraph touched his lips pictures a spark of divine love—pure, unselfish love—which alone can cleanse the heart of unworthy feelings and enable the lips to speak the truth. Then Isaiah heard the voice saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" This pictures the understanding that the Lord needs individual men and women to do His work in the world. The Lord's call comes to each one of us. If we think of ourselves, we shall immediately imagine all the sacrifice and difficulty which devotion to the Lord's service will involve. But if we really wish to be good people, we shall be willing, like Isaiah, to accept the call personally, and to answer, "Here am I; send me."

The rest of the chapter tells Isaiah plainly how the people would receive his message. Some would close their ears, being too satisfied with themselves to wish to change or to think of possible consequences. But a few would listen and take the message to heart and would serve as the remnant through whom the Lord's church could

be rebuilt. This is a lesson which we find several times in the Word. Each of us should try not to be of the self-satisfied ones who close their ears to the Lord's teaching. But also the thought should encourage us when sometimes we try to give others the truths of the New Church and they are not received. If we keep trying faithfully, we shall certainly find a few who will welcome what the Lord has entrusted to us to give them, and we shall be preserving and increasing the Lord's kingdom on earth and in the heavens.

Basic Correspondences

a throne = judgment
seraphim (or cherubim) = divine providence protecting
the face = the inner character

Senior

The principal lesson for the Seniors is in the application to our own lives of the successive steps of Isaiah's vision. They are at a point where the difficulties of living the Christian life in the modern world are becoming apparent to them. The lives of the prophets can serve as an inspiration to fortify them against the temptation to give up the effort.

The seventeen books of the Prophets, as they are arranged in our Bible, are not in exact historical order. Although some of them do belong to the time after the taking captive of Israel and Judah, many of them parallel the history in the books of Kings. The earliest is thought to have been the minor prophet Jonah. A number were contemporaries. Each, like the many prophets who left no written record of their words, had his own place and time, and his words had a meaning for the people of that time. Bible scholars make use of the peculiarities of the text and the historical allusions in the letter to place the men historically. This study is interesting and helpful so long as we are careful to sift out the theories which are based on purely humanistic premises, for these leave the Lord's providence and the possibility of prophecy out of the picture.

For us, however, the value of the Prophets is not in the personality of the individual or in his effect on his own people and time,

interesting as such considerations are, but in what the Lord is saying through these chosen men to us today. For through them He speaks to us just as really as He spoke to the ancient Hebrews through their lips in the first place. What we learn from the Prophets will depend partly on our own states and needs and partly on the effort we make to find the inner meaning of their words with the help of the key to interpretation given to the new age by the Lord through Swedenborg. Although there are some simple lessons and even some stories in the letter of these seventeen books (Jeremiah wrote two), they are for the most part composed of "dark sayings," food for a lifetime of study and thought for each person in all time.

The Lord through all His spokesmen is trying to point out to us the way of life, so that we may choose the way that leads to happiness and avoid the pitfalls which lie beside the road. The purpose of the Lord is to neglect nothing which could help us to choose the right path. But if we close our ears to His prophets, as their contemporaries did, He cannot help us. The choice is always ours.

The four Major Prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel—belong to the last days of the Israelitish nation. The first two prophesied before the captivity, Jeremiah also writing the book of Lamentations in Egypt after the captivity, and the last two to the period of the captivity itself. It is easy to see why Isaiah and Jeremiah were persecuted as prophets of doom, while Ezekiel and Daniel were honored. When we are in trouble, we turn to the Lord.

Our chapter for today is from the book of Isaiah, the first of the Major Prophets. It concerns Isaiah's call, and it teaches us lessons which are true not only of every prophet but of every individual who wishes to advance the Lord's kingdom. Isaiah's experience is given to show us what is necessary if one is to speak for the Lord to others: first, a vision of the Lord as king and judge; second, the humble sense of one's own unworthiness; third, the consecration conferred by the touch of the Lord's unselfish love, the coal from the altar; and finally, the readiness to do the Lord's will.

We see also that the Lord told Isaiah quite plainly that most of the people would not listen to him. The hardest part of the true

prophet's task is to continue to speak the truth though it falls on deaf ears. The last and most severe temptation of the Lord Himself in his earthly life was the temptation to try to save men against their wills, and we remember, too, that on the cross, the Lord was allowed for a moment to feel Himself forsaken by the Divine within.

But there is also in the last verse of our chapter the prophecy of the remnant. There will always be some few who will listen and remember. And in each one of us, so long as we are permitted by the Lord to remain in this world, there is this remnant, this possibility of return. So beware of trying even for a short time to stifle your conscience, for your conscience is the Lord's voice trying to reach you through whatever remains of goodness and truth you have in your heart and mind. This is not to say that your conscience always tells you what is right, for there may be very little truth there for the Lord to use; but the promptings are always a warning that you need to stop and think and try to find out whether you are really choosing a right and wise course or not.

Adult

The mission of the prophets to us is the outstanding lesson for the Adults, and the class should be inspired to wish to study them seriously with the help of the writings.

The prophets were those who spoke for the Lord. Their words, although taken from the content of their own minds, were not their own, but were chosen and arranged by the Lord to express what He wanted to say not only to the ancient Hebrews but to all men for all time. To the people of the Old Testament the words of the prophets had an immediate meaning which related to their national life, rather than to the life of their individual souls. To us also the words written by the prophets have an immediate meaning, but it is a meaning which relates not to our national life but to our spiritual life. The Lord is speaking to us today through the recorded words of the prophets, and He

has given us the key to unlock the meaning which these words are meant to have for us. The prophets all had a common mission, to point out and denounce evil and show what it led to, and to promise the rewards of righteousness. Yet we know that the Lord does not repeat Himself—even apparent repetitions in the letter take on varied meaning from their contexts—and so each of the prophets has a special message to meet special conditions and needs. The general historical background of each, so far as it may be drawn from the letter of the Word, will help us to read this special message.

The four Major Prophets were all from the kingdom of Judah. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel lived near the end of that kingdom, all three witnessing the captivity. Ezekiel and Daniel were both carried away among the early captives and prophesied from exile. Jeremiah wrote just before the captivity, and because he prophesied it and urged the people to submit, he was allowed by the king of Babylon to remain in his home; but later some of those who were left in the land forced him against his will to flee with them to Egypt, and it was there that he wrote the book of Lamentations. The book of Daniel was written in Babylon. The Jews did not include either Lamentations or Daniel in their Scripture canon because they were written outside of the Holy Land. Ezekiel wrote in Mesopotamia, but the Jews accepted him as inspired, possibly because he so often speaks of being carried in the spirit to Jerusalem for his visions.

Isaiah, as our chapter tells us, received his call “in the year that king Uzziah died,” and prophesied in Judah during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Recalling the meaning of Judah we see that Isaiah gives us the Lord’s message to our affectional life at a time when we have departed very far from following the Lord in our minds and in our conduct, and when our ruling love is wavering between self and the Lord. King Uzziah, though a good king, was a leper, and leprosy in a good man pictures the inability to live rightly because of lack of the knowledge of what is genuinely good. When we have experienced the fullness of such a state, pictured by Uzziah’s death, the voice of the Lord comes to

us in some powerful way; it was a fitting time for Isaiah's call. Jotham, the next king, was good, but he was followed by the wicked Ahaz. So our wavering will responds to the voice of the Lord and then falls back. But when we once more resolve to reform and to make a thorough job of it, we seek the Lord's counsel voluntarily, as Hezekiah sought the advice of Isaiah whenever he was in need of it. We recall that Hezekiah carried out the most thoroughgoing reforms of any of the kings of Judah.*

We are perhaps more or less familiar with the major characteristics of the four long prophetic books. Jeremiah is the prophet of doom. Ezekiel stands out in our minds for his visions of Jerusalem and the temple, in some respects very much like the visions of John in Revelation. Daniel is the voice of the faithful few among the captives in Babylon, whose steadfastness eventually made sufficient impression on their captors to bring about the return. In the book of Isaiah we are perhaps most familiar with the beautiful prophecies of the Advent, and we know Isaiah as a person from his dealings with Hezekiah. But Isaiah's call, with which our chapter for today deals, presents some of the basic principles which apply to all prophecy and indeed to all genuine service of the Lord.

Isaiah had a vision of the Lord as to His omnipotence, king and judge, sitting upon His throne, addressed as Jehovah ZebaOTH, the Lord of hosts (AC 2921). The seraphim above the throne picture the protecting power of the Lord. Wings picture spiritual truth (AC 8765), and the three pair of wings show the power of spiritual truth to protect the interiors (the face) and the exteriors (the feet) and to lift one up above the level of merely natural things. Isaiah was afraid because he recognized his unworthiness. The mouth pictures thought from affection (AE 580) and the lips the interior things of man (AC 1286). In AE 580 (see below) Swedenborg explains quite simply the purification in Isaiah's vision. Following this, Isaiah was ready to be the Lord's messenger.

We remember the Lord's teaching in Matthew 15:11, 17-19 that

*Josiah is often ranked with Hezekiah in this respect. —Ed.

it is what proceeds out of the mouth which defiles a man, for "those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart." The first part of the message given to Isaiah, which is quoted in all the Gospels (Matthew 13:14, Mark 4:12, Luke 8:10, John 12:40), like the statements about the Lord's hardening Pharoah's heart, have been puzzling to many. We are often told by Swedenborg that the people of that day were of such a nature that they cared only for material things and that if they had perceived spiritual things, they would have profaned them. It is part of the Lord's mercy that we are permitted to see and acknowledge only so much of the truth as we are capable of living up to. The more selfish we become the more our minds are closed against the truth. Isaiah was to tell people that this state would continue until the land was utterly desolate, and that only then could a new beginning be made. The "tenth" which should return pictures the remains of good which are always preserved by the Lord as a possible new beginning. Each new church is founded on such a "tenth," and likewise each new beginning in us. These remains are likened to the terebinth or oak on account of their strength and persistence.

The call to be a messenger of the Lord comes to each one of us, and it begins with a vision of the Lord as king and judge. We are told, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5:48) If we are to imitate the Lord, it is not enough to believe vaguely that there is a God: we must have a clear and definite idea of His character and power. The next step is to realize and acknowledge our own unworthiness, to see how far we are by nature from the pure love and wisdom which are the Lord. Then the cleansing fire of the Lord's unselfish love can come in and purify our motives, and inspire us to say, "Here am I; send me." Finally our message becomes clear: all worldliness and selfishness must be put away and the heavenly character must be built on the remains which the Lord has preserved in us for this purpose.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 580: "One of the seraphim touching the mouth and lips of the prophet signifies his interior purification, which is that of the understanding and will, and thus inauguration into the gift of teaching; the burning coal from the altar signifies the Divine love, from which is all purification, and the mouth and lips signify thought and affection, or what is the same, the understanding and the will; when these are purified man is withdrawn from iniquity and sin; consequently it is said, 'therefore thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin is expiated.' Anyone can see that iniquity is not taken away by a burning coal applied to the mouth and lips."

Arcana Coelestia, n. 303: "A man acquires a life by all the things he is persuaded of, that is, which he acknowledges and believes. That of which he is not persuaded, or does not acknowledge and believe, does not affect his mind. And therefore no one can profane holy things unless he has been so persuaded of them that he acknowledges them, and yet denies them. Those who do not acknowledge may know, but are as if they did not know, and are like those who know things that have no existence. Such were the Jews about the time of the Lord's advent, and therefore they are said in the Word to be 'vastated,' or 'laid waste,' that is, to have no longer any faith. Under these circumstances it does men no injury to have the interior contents of the Word opened to them, for they are as persons seeing, and yet not seeing; hearing, and yet not hearing; and whose hearts are stopped up (Isaiah 6:9, 10). That the mysteries of faith are not revealed until men are in such a state, that is, are so vastated that they no longer believe (in order, as before said, that they may not be able to profane them), the Lord also plainly declares in the subsequent verses of the same Prophet (6:12). He is called a 'man' who is wise, or who acknowledges and believes."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. What is a prophet? *one who speaks for the Lord*
- P. About what great prophet to Israel have we had a story? *Elijah*
- J. What Judge was also a prophet? *Samuel*
- J. Into what three parts did the Hebrews divide their Bible? *Law, Prophets, Writings*
- J. What books did they include in their Prophets which we think of as historical books? *Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings*
- J. Into what two groups do we divide the Prophets? *Major, Minor*
- J. Why are they called *Major* and *Minor*? *longer, shorter*
- P. How many Major Prophets are there? *four*

- P. Can you name them? *Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel*
- P. About which one is our lesson today? *Isaiah*
- J. When and where did Isaiah prophesy? *Judah, reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah*
- P. Whom did Isaiah see in his vision? *the Lord*
- P. What can you tell about the seraphim? *six wings*
- P. Why was Isaiah frightened? *"unclean" lips*
- J. How did the Lord purify Isaiah's lips? *live coal*
- P. What did the Lord ask? *"Whom shall I send?"*
- P. What did Isaiah say? *"Here am I; send me."*
- I. What was the mission of the prophets? *point out evils, call to repentance*
- S. What do we learn in this lesson are the qualities which we must have if we are to serve the Lord effectively? *vision of Lord, humility, consecration, willingness to serve*

THE MAJOR PROPHETS

Jeremiah 1

This is another background lesson and the important thing, except for Primaries, is to see that the classes know who are meant by the Major Prophets, where their books come in the Bible, what their position was with reference to the history concerned, and what the function of a prophet was. Also essential are the meaning of the word *prophet*, the fact that the prophets spoke by inspiration, and something of the various types of inspiration.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord has never left men without sufficient truth to guide them. A prophet is a person who "speaks for" God. The whole Word is prophecy.

The Lord will always help us to speak the truth in the right way if we are looking to Him instead of to ourselves for knowledge and power.

Fruit represents the good which comes from obeying the truth.

Notes for Parents

In our Bible the Prophets are the last seventeen books of the Old Testament. There are four Major and twelve Minor Prophets, "Major" and "Minor" referring to the length of their books. Two books, Jeremiah and Lamentations, are attributed to Jeremiah. A prophet is one who speaks for the Lord. Again and again—more than fifty times—Jeremiah says "the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah." The Lord has always spoken to men through prophets, giving them the divine truth which they needed to correct their mistakes and lead them to heavenly happiness. In Luke 1:70 Zacharias says, "As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began."

All the prophets, however, were not given messages for people of all time. Only a few were chosen for this work, and the Lord provided that their messages should be preserved and recorded in the Bible.

The four major prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. All of them prophesied to the people of Judah. We have seen that Isaiah lived in the time of king Hezekiah. Jeremiah lived about a century later in the last days of the kingdom of Judah. He prophesied its fall and lived to see his prophecies literally fulfilled. The book called Lamentations was written through him after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Ezekiel and Daniel were both among the captives carried away to Babylon, and they prophesied to their people there. But all four of these prophets have a message for us within the message which they delivered to the people of their day.

Primary

The chapter from Jeremiah contains enough "story" to interest the children. Be sure they understand what a prophet is. The teacher will probably not want to read the whole chapter in class. He should look it over beforehand and mark the sections he wants to read. Follow the outline given in the notes. Stress the fact that there were many prophets but that the Lord chose only a few of them for the writing of the Word.

Long ago, in the days when the Bible was being written, the Lord used to choose certain men to speak for Him to the people. Sometimes He appeared to them in dreams and told them what to say. Sometimes He spoke from inside their minds and they heard His voice although they did not see Him. But they knew that they must speak just the words He told them to speak. It was His message they were to give, and not anything they made up themselves. These men were called prophets.

You remember that Samuel was a prophet as well as a Judge.

Do you remember the names of the two great prophets who tried to save the kingdom of Israel?

Who was the prophet who was sent to Hezekiah?

Sometimes the prophets were told also to write the Lord's words in books so that people could always have them to read, and that is the way the Word was given to us. Everyone who wrote part of the Word was a prophet, but we do not know the names of all of them. However, we do know some of them. There were four great prophets who wrote quite long books. They were Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, and because their books were long they were called the "Major" Prophets.

Jeremiah was a prophet in Judah about a hundred years after Isaiah.

In whose reign did he begin to prophesy?

What did Jeremiah say when the Lord first called him?

What did the Lord tell him?

What two visions did the Lord then give him?

Judah was near its end.

The people had become so bad that almost all of Jeremiah's prophecies were reproofs and warnings.

The people hated Jeremiah because all he had to tell them was bad news.

But he was the only prophet who lived to see his prophecies fulfilled.

He saw Judah taken captive by Babylon, and Jerusalem and the temple destroyed.

After that he wrote the book of Lamentations, which consists of five poems of mourning.

Some of the poorer people, whom the king of Babylon had left in the land, fled to Egypt.

They took Jeremiah with them against his will.

Some of the last chapters of the book of Jeremiah were written in Egypt.

The other two Major Prophets were Ezekiel and Daniel.

They were both among those carried away to Babylon, and they prophesied in captivity.

Junior

The Juniors should learn the names of the four Major Prophets and be able to find them quickly in the Bible. Have them look up the Bible references given in their notes and study a map to find the geographical location of various enemies mentioned in the book of Jeremiah. The story of Jeremiah's call and its consequences to him will interest the class.

What is a prophet?

What great Judge was also a prophet?

What prophet was sent to Ahab?
What prophet followed him?
Who are the four Major Prophets?
Where have we learned about Isaiah?

Jeremiah was also a prophet in Judah. He lived about a century after Isaiah in the last days of the kingdom of Judah.

In whose reign did Jeremiah begin to prophesy?
What did he say when the Lord called him?
What did the Lord tell him?
In verse 10 what opposite things is Jeremiah called to do?

This expresses the work of a prophet. The prophet speaks for the Lord, and the Lord's desire is to help each one of us to build a heavenly character, but this cannot be done except as the bad, selfish things in us are rooted out and destroyed. All the prophets had a message from the Lord for the people of their time, but what they were commanded to write down was also for all people in all times.

What was the first vision Jeremiah had?

Read Numbers 17:1-8. This incident happened during the wilderness journey. You remember that Aaron was the first high priest of the Jews. The people had been rebelling against Moses and Aaron, and the Lord gave them this sign to show that Aaron was really His minister. The almond was a symbol of goodness from the Lord, and the almond rod the symbol of truth from the Lord which leads to that goodness. So now the Lord shows Jeremiah a "rod of an almond tree" and tells him that it means that His Word will accomplish His purposes. Read Isaiah 55:11.

What was Jeremiah's second vision?
What did the Lord tell him it meant?
What did the Lord promise Jeremiah?

The Lord kept His promise. Jeremiah was faithful to his task all his life, and because the people of Judah had become so evil, they did not want to listen and they hated Jeremiah and tried in every way to get rid of him. They beat him, and put him in the stocks

and in prison, and kept him in a muddy pit with nothing to eat. But the Lord kept him alive and saved him each time. Jeremiah was the only one of the prophets who lived to see his prophecies fulfilled. Judah was taken captive by Babylon, and Jerusalem and the temples were destroyed. The book of Lamentations, which consists in the Hebrew of five poems of mourning, was written through Jeremiah to express the tragedy of such a fall. All the great men of Judah as well as many of the others were carried away captive to Babylon. Only the "poor" of the land were left to care for the fields and vineyards. Jeremiah told them to stay in the land and be patient, but many were afraid to stay and fled to Egypt, and they took Jeremiah with them against his will. Chapters 43 and 44 and probably some of the other later chapters of the book were written in Egypt. It is believed that Jeremiah died in Egypt. Chapters 46 to 51 are largely devoted to prophecies of the destruction of the enemies which had overcome Judah: Babylon, Egypt, the Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Kedar, and Elam, and the cities of Damascus and Hazor. Babylon, of course, was the great conqueror, but the constant harrying by the others had weakened Judah. If we think of the land of Canaan as the "promised land," heaven or a heavenly character, we can see that all these enemies are pictures of the bad things in us which destroy heavenly character. The two great enemies are Assyria—which conquered Israel—and Babylon. Assyria as an enemy pictures our reasoning power when it is used to defend our own desires, and Babylon pictures the selfish love of getting our own way. The other enemies are all lesser evils which attack us from time to time and undermine our resistance.

The other two Major Prophets, Ezekiel and Daniel, prophesied from their captivity in Babylon. The four Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel are called "Major" because more of their prophecies are preserved in the Word than of any of the twelve "Minor" Prophets. The books of the Minor Prophets are equally inspired.

Intermediate

The interpretation of the two visions in the chapter is important for this class as well as the study of the mission of all the prophets of the Word not only to their own time but to us in our lives.

In our lesson on Hezekiah we made the acquaintance of the great prophet Isaiah. The Lord had always sent prophets to carry His messages to mankind. A prophet is one who "speaks for" someone, especially for God. And because many of God's messages have concerned the things which would happen in the future as a result of what men were doing, we have come to think of a prophet at one who foretells the future.

Verse 10 of our chapter for today, in which the Lord gives Jeremiah his commission, expresses the true work of a prophet. It has two sides: "to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy and to throw down" evil, and "to build, and to plant" good. The rooting out and throwing down must come before the building and planting, because we all have so many selfish feelings and wrong thoughts which stand in the way of the growth of the heavenly character which the Lord wants us to have.

There were four "Major" Prophets, so called only because more of their prophecies were preserved in the Word than of any of the twelve "Minor" Prophets. All four prophesied within a period of about two hundred and fifty years and to the people of the kingdom of Judah, but the last two, Ezekiel and Daniel, prophesied from captivity in Babylon. The books of these last two, as well as that of Isaiah, are full of prophecies of the coming of the Messiah and the restoration of true worship of the Lord. These prophecies brought comfort and hope to the few good people who remained faithful to the Lord through the dark days of the fall and captivity of Judah.

The book of Jeremiah is almost entirely given to condemnation and warning, although he, too, has a few prophecies of the restoration, such as we find in 23:3-8, 30:1-3, and 33:6-18. Jeremiah, as we learn from our chapter for today, was first called by the Lord in the reign of king Josiah, who was the last king of Judah to

attempt reforms. During the reigns of the four kings who succeeded Josiah, a period of less than twenty-five years, conditions became rapidly worse, until Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon finally destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and carried most of the Jews away to Babylon. Jeremiah lived through this period. By the favor of Nebuchadnezzar he was allowed to remain in his home along with the "poor" of the land who were left to take care of the fields and vineyards. He counseled them to stay at home and be patient, but a large number of them were afraid and insisted on fleeing to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them against his will. Chapters 43 and 44 and probably others of his later prophecies were written in Egypt. The book of Lamentations, which in the Hebrew consists of five remarkable poems, was also written through Jeremiah to express the mourning over the loss of goodness which is pictured by the captivity of Judah. Jeremiah is believed to have died in Egypt.

In our chapter two visions are given to Jeremiah, the vision of "a rod of an almond tree" and the vision of "a seething pot" with its face toward the north. These are both explained to Jeremiah by the Lord. Of the almond rod the Lord says, "for I will hasten my word to perform it." The almond tree represents truth from the Lord and its fruit the good which comes from obeying that truth. (Read Numbers 17:1-8.) A rod always is the symbol of power—you remember the power Moses exercised through his rod. So the vision of the almond rod is a picture of the wonderful possibilities which the Lord gives to every one of us in His revealed truth. The other vision is a picture of what happens when we look to our natural, worldly ideas for guidance instead of to the Lord's truth. The pot was turned toward the north. The cold north pictures the state of mind furthest from the Lord because, you remember, the Lord is the sun of our souls. When we turn away from the Lord, our minds become full of all sorts of conflicting ideas like the water boiling in the pot. We have no steady purpose and no peace of mind. And these false ideas finally take away our goodness, as the evil "out of the north" overcame Judah. This is one of the

places in the Word where the spiritual meaning is explained in the letter.

In the letter the prophecies of Jeremiah of course concerned the state of the Jewish nation in its last days and the inevitable results of its evils. But all the prophecies in the Word in their internal sense apply to the states of people of all times and nations. They go deep into our hearts and minds and point out what is wrong with us, and they tell us what must happen to us if we insist on going our own selfish way, and what wonderful things we may have if only we will obey the Lord. Jeremiah was the only prophet who lived to see his prophecies literally fulfilled.

Basic Correspondences

a rod = power

the almond tree = truth from the Lord

the north = a natural and worldly state of mind

Senior

With this class take up more of the history of the prophets and the meaning of their office as it is made evident in the letter of the Word. Also discuss the difference between the written Word and the prophetic utterances which were not divinely preserved.

In the *Benedictus* (Luke 1:68-79), part of which we sometimes sing in church, are the familiar words, "As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began." The Lord has never left men without sufficient knowledge of the truth to guide them if they chose to be led by Him. The Israelites call the books of the Bible from Joshua through II Kings (excluding the book of Ruth) "the Former Prophets." Samuel, we recall, was recognized throughout the land as a prophet, and we all know the stories of the great prophets Elijah and Elisha. But there were many other prophets all through the history of the Old Testament. In the time of Samuel they lived together in companies under the instruction and direction of Samuel (I Samuel 19:18-24). In I Kings 18:4 we read that Jezebel "cut off the prophets of the Lord," and

that Obadiah saved a hundred of them and "hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water." That those called prophets did not always speak from divine inspiration we learn in several places, notably in Isaiah 30:9-10, Jeremiah 14:13-16, and Matthew 7:22-23. We also learn from Amos 7:14 that the Lord did not always choose His prophets from among the companies of the prophets. But except for a period of a century or two before the call of Samuel when "there was no open vision" (I Samuel 3:1), there were always prophets of the Lord in the land who pointed out the wrongdoings of the people, predicted what would happen if they continued, and promised them blessing if they would return to the service of the Lord.

Every true prophet of the Lord had a message for the people of his time. The Lord alone sees the hearts of all men and knows what each will choose to do with the opportunities that are given him. So He is able to make provision for the salvation of all who wish to be good. His providence is over every individual life and over all history, insuring to everyone from day to day the opportunity to choose freely what he wants to be. But not all the prophets were given a message of universal import. Of the multitude of prophecies which must have been spoken through the ages, only a few were chosen by the Lord to be written down and preserved as part of the Word. The books of Moses are of course prophecy throughout. Moses and after him the "former" prophets wrote their message in the form of an account of the history of the nation, which could be directed by the Lord for that purpose. We do not know the names of these former prophets, who wrote the books of the Word from Joshua through II Kings.

The "latter prophets" are the sixteen whose books conclude the Old Testament. These books are not consecutive history, although they contain many references to circumstances and conditions of the times in which they were written. Some chapters thus had in the letter an obvious meaning for the people of that time, but the greater part of them were "dark" sayings. The fact is that it is the internal states of people which are described through the prophets.

During the history of the first Christian Church many attempts at interpretation were made, but without a knowledge of correspondence no consistent interpretation could be formulated. There are many verses indeed in which the inner meaning shines through the letter so clearly that they have become popular sermon texts and thus familiar to churchgoing people, but the study of the books of the prophets as a whole has in modern times largely deteriorated into textual study with a view to finding out just when the books were written and by whom, and whether or not, for example, the whole of the book of Isaiah could have been the work of one man. Study of the text is always interesting, but it is really fruitful only when it can be divorced from the premise that the human penmen were the real authors of the books.

The prophets all claimed divine inspiration. "The word of the Lord came . . ." is a common expression in all of them. They saw visions and heard the voice of the Lord speaking to them either from within or from without. Consider the call of Jeremiah, which we take as the basis of our lesson today. Verses 2 and 3 of chapter 1 tell us that the word of the Lord came to him first in the days of Josiah king of Judah, and then throughout the remaining years of the kingdom. The rest of the chapter is the record of a conversation with the Lord in which Jeremiah was reluctant to assume a task which called for addressing the people, and the Lord promised to put the words in his mouth and also to protect him against the wrath of the people, who would not want to hear the truth he would speak. We sometimes lose opportunities for doing good because we are afraid to "speak out" against things we know to be wrong. It will help us to remember that, if we can forget ourselves, the Lord is always present to help us say the right thing. Jeremiah was given two visions—of the "rod of an almond tree" and of "a seething pot" whose face was toward the north—and the Lord explained to him the meaning of both visions. The whole chapter is the account of a direct communication from the Lord and a compelling commission to go out and speak the message of the Lord. The expression "the word of the Lord" occurs more than

fifty times in the book of Jeremiah.

The four Major Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Isaiah, as we have seen, lived in the time of Hezekiah. Jeremiah lived to see some of his prophecies literally fulfilled, for he saw Jerusalem and the temple destroyed and the greater part of the people of Judah carried away to Babylon. The latter part of the book of Jeremiah and the book of Lamentations were written after this took place. Ezekiel and Daniel were among the young men carried away, and they prophesied to the captives in Babylon.

Adult

The general place and message of the Major Prophets and of Jeremiah in particular will offer many points for discussion, as well as the meaning of his original call and visions and his prophecies concerning the nations other than Judah. This is a good lesson in which to remind the Adults of Swedenborg's characterization of the Word as like a man clothed but with his hands and face bare [S. 55, E. 778⁶].

The people of the Most Ancient Church before the fall had open communication with the heavens and were led by a dictate in the will, but that after the will became evil, man had to receive instruction in his understanding and by obedience develop a new will there. Through the prophets, therefore, the Lord spoke to the understanding of men. All of the Ancient Word and of our Word was given through prophets. We sing in the Benedictus: "As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began."

Only a very small portion of what was spoken by the prophets is recorded in the Word. The message given to most of the prophets was for the people of their time and was not preserved. Its general character, however, must have been the same, because it came from the Lord and had one fundamental purpose: to point out the evils into which men had fallen and to give them the truth they needed to lead them out of evil into good. In the first chapter of Jeremiah, which we have chosen as the example on which to base our study today, this purpose is expressed in verse 10: "See, I have

this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant."

All of the Word is prophecy, a divinely given message from the Lord. In the letter a distinction is made between the Law and the Prophets, but the "Law," the five books of Moses, is full of direct assertions of revelation, visions, angel appearances, the voice of the Lord speaking, and even appearances of the Lord, as well as various signs and wonders. The Hebrew canon classes the books from Joshua through II Kings (excepting the book of Ruth) as the "former" prophets, recognizing that these books also were given through divinely inspired prophets, though their names were not known. The Pentateuch and these books of the former prophets fell into the form of a narrative of ancient Jewish history. They had a literal meaning as well as a universal and eternal inner or spiritual meaning. But the books of the "latter" prophets, the books which we customarily think of as the prophets, have only very limited reference to the Hebrew nation. Even the book of Jeremiah, written just before the end of the kingdom of Judah, contains many cryptic statements which are hard to relate to the events of his time. The people of that day interpreted the Messianic prophecies as promises of their restoration as the leading nation of the world, but these promises in this sense have never been fulfilled and never will be. Under the figure of the Judaic people and nation Jeremiah and the others were given to speak of a spiritual kingdom of truth and righteousness, the Church which the Lord's coming was to reestablish.

The latter Prophets are divided into four "Major" and twelve "Minor" Prophets. The four Major Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Their historical position is clear, as it is stated in the letter. They all prophesied to the people of Judah. Isaiah was prophet in the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. It was by heeding his warnings and advice that Judah was saved from the destruction which befell Israel at the hands of Assyria. Jeremiah, as our chapter tells us, was first called to be prophet in

the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah, the last good king of Judah. He prophesied the end of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and he lived to see his prophecies literally fulfilled. Through the favor of Nebuchadnezzar, he was not himself carried to Babylon, but he was taken against his will by some of his own people to Egypt, where he is believed to have died. Some of his later prophecies (Jeremiah 43:8) and possibly the book of Lamentations were written in Egypt. Ezekiel and Daniel were both among the captives taken to Babylon and were called to prophesy to the people of Judah in captivity. To these people, upon whom the calamities had fallen which Jeremiah had prophesied, the "bad news" for which they had so hated him, the promises of restoration given through Ezekiel and Daniel were welcome comfort. So Ezekiel and Daniel, almost alone among the prophets, were popular and rose to positions of eminence.

Jeremiah was beaten, put in stocks, cast into prison, let down into a pit where he sank in the mire, left without food, and threatened with death. All these things picture what men do to the truth when it crosses their worldly and selfish desires. But the truth prevails in the end and vindicates itself. The command and promise to Jeremiah in verses 17-19 of our chapter express the Lord's unfailing provision that the truth shall be made available and His protection over it.

The two brief visions given to Jeremiah at the beginning of his work are interesting in their correspondence. We recall that the rod of Aaron (Numbers 17:1-8), the only one of the rods of the twelve tribes which blossomed and bore fruit, was an almond rod. See the passages from AC 5622² and 8408³ below. The texts referred to in both these instances are among those places in the Word where the Lord in the letter clearly indicates the internal meaning. Verse 12 gives you the meaning of the almond rod, and verse 16 that of the seething pot.

The greater part of the book of Jeremiah is taken up with the condition of Judah—symbol of the Church as to good—and prophecies of its end. But a few chapters (46 to 51:58) prophesy the

doom which will eventually overtake the enemies of Judah: Egypt, the Philistines, Moab and Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, Elam, and finally the arch-enemy Babylon. We can see in these a series of enemies to our spiritual progress: Egypt, the reliance on natural memory-knowledges; the Philistines, knowing the truth without doing it; Moab and Ammon, "adulterated good and falsified truth"; Edom, turning aside from good by despising truth; Damascus, perversion of knowledges of truth; Kedar, not being in truth because not in good; Hazor, the falsity of evil; Elam, the spiritual church desolated; Babylon, the love of dominion from the love of self. This is a searching catalogue of the temptations which must be met and overcome by us as individuals and by the Church and the world. At first glance they may seem repetitious, but if we consider each one carefully, looking for examples of it in our own thought and in the thought and life of the world about us, we shall see not only differences among them but a natural progression from one to the other, leading us away from trust in the Lord and His Word to a final setting up of our own will and intelligence as the center of the universe, which everything and everybody else should serve.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 5622²: "Almonds signify goods of life corresponding to the truths of good of the interior natural . . . This tree itself signifies in the spiritual sense a perception of interior truth which is from good, its 'blossom' interior truth which is from good, and its 'fruit' good of life thence derived. In this sense the almond tree is spoken of in Jeremiah . . . a 'rod' denotes power; 'almond tree' the perception of interior truth."

Arcana Coelestia, n. 6000: "Revelations were made either by dreams, or by night visions, or by day visions, or by speech within the man, or by speech without him from angels that were seen, and also by speech without him from angels that were not seen."

Arcana Coelestia, n. 8408³: "Here a 'boiling pot' denotes a people whom falsities have taken possession of; 'the north' denotes the sensuous and corporeal of man from which evil springs. The end of the church is here treated of,

when the external, consequently the sensuous and corporeal, and with these falsity and evil, rule; for the Lord's church goes successively from internal to external, and then expires."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Where did the prophets get their messages? *from the Lord, in visions or dreams*
- J. What work were they called to do? *warn people about their evils, exhort them to do good*
- J. Can you name the four Major Prophets? *Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel*
- J. In what time did Isaiah prophesy? *reign of Hezekiah*
- J. When did Jeremiah begin to prophesy? *Josiah's reign*
- P. What did he say when the Lord called him? *I cannot speak: for I am a child*
- P. What did the Lord tell him? *I will put my words in your mouth*
- J. What two kinds of work was he to do? *tear down, build up*
- P. What was the first vision he had? *"rod" of almond*
- J. What did the Lord tell him it meant? *"I shall hasten to perform my work"*
- P. What was his second vision? *boiling pot in the north*
- J. What did it mean? *evil was to come from the north*
- J. What great tragedy did he witness? *Babylonian invasion*
- J. What is the book of Lamentations about? *mourning the fall of Jerusalem*
- J. In what country did Jeremiah do most of his work? *Judah*
- J. In what other country did he later prophesy? *Egypt*
- J. How did he happen to go to Egypt? *taken against his will by rebellious people*
- J. Where did Ezekiel and Daniel prophesy? *Babylon*
- J. How did they get to Babylon? *taken with captives*

EZEKIEL'S VISION

Ezekiel 1

Review the background material concerning the four Major Prophets. Be sure that the pupils know what a prophet is, why these four were called "Major," and that they can name the four. Even with the Primaries it is useful to say the names and have the children repeat them after you. Young children like to say new words, and most children will find the Bible names easy to speak and to remember if they become familiar with their sound early.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord hides from us truths which we are not ready to use.

The visions of the prophets had a message to the Jewish people of their time, but they have a deeper message to us.

We should now be able to see rationally the working of Divine providence.

Sin is doing things which we know to be wrong.

Notes for Parents

Did you ever wonder what cherubim are? In the first place the -im is just the plural ending in the Hebrew; so cherubim are cherubs. They are mentioned a number of times in the Bible. In the wonderful symbolic story of the Garden of Eden, for example, after Adam and Eve disobeyed and were driven out of the garden, we read that the Lord placed cherubim at the entrance with a flaming sword "to keep the way of the tree of life." And in our lesson on the ark of the covenant we learned that by command they placed two golden figures of cherubim on the mercy seat on top of the ark, and that the Lord promised to speak to the people from "between the cherubim." Today we have a lesson which describes cherubim, and they may not seem to be as we have pictured them.

Ezekiel the prophet was one of the priests of Judah. He was taken captive with several thousand of his countrymen when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, took full control of the kingdom of Judah. He was carried into Chaldea and lived there by the river Chebar, and after five years the Lord called him to be a prophet. Over a period of about twenty years he was given visions and prophecies to tell to the captive people. Our chapter describes his first vision.

The word *cherubim* is not used in this chapter, but a little later (chapter 10) Ezekiel had another vision of the same living creatures and there he called them cherubim. So we know that the cherubim were these strange creatures of vision, with four faces and wings, with hands under their wings, and feet that shone like polished brass, and great wheels beside them full of eyes. No material person or animal could be like these; so we know that they were not actual beings but were symbolic representations of something the Lord wanted Ezekiel and wants us to know about. What they represent is divine providence which is always over us, seeing all that we do and are and watching and guarding every least thing in the world so that goodness will be protected, and so that from moment to moment each one of us may be free to think and to choose for himself what he wants to be. The vision was like a marvelous moving picture acted out before the eyes of Ezekiel's spirit to show him how close the all-wise Lord was to him all the time. You can imagine that after Ezekiel had once seen this, he would not hesitate to speak boldly the words which the Lord put into his mouth.

Primary

Be sure the children know what a prophet is and the names of the four Major Prophets. Sketch briefly the story of the fall of Judah and Ezekiel's history so far as it is known. Then read them this first vision of his and tell them in general what the Lord was showing him by means of it.

When the king of Babylon conquered the kingdom of Judah, he made most of the people of Judah leave their homes and go to live

in Babylon. The people did not want to go, and they were very unhappy. But they had to learn that their country was a gift to them from the Lord and that if they wanted to keep it, they must love Him and do what He taught them was right. The Lord had sent prophets to warn them over and over again, but they would not listen. Now they had to learn the hard way.

But the Lord had not deserted them. He does the best He can for us always. So He gave them a new prophet to tell them that if they tried to do better, they would someday be allowed to go home again. This prophet's name was Ezekiel. He was one of their own priests, who had been carried away to Babylon with them.

After they had lived in Babylon for five years, the Lord began to give Ezekiel messages for them, and He gave him several wonderful visions.

A prophet in the Bible is one who speaks for the Lord.

Four of the prophets were called *Major Prophets*, because of the length of their books.

Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesied in Judah.

Ezekiel and Daniel prophesied in Babylon after the people were taken captive.

Do you have dreams? Sometimes we try to tell people afterward what we have dreamed, and we find it hard to make them understand just what we have seen. A vision is like a dream, only it is about something that is really happening or going to happen.

What strange vision did Ezekiel see?

Later, in chapter 10, he calls these same living creatures *cherubim*.

You remember the figures of cherubim on the cover of the ark.

What four faces did the living creatures have?

What went beside them on the earth?

What else can you tell about them?

Now read verses 22 to 28.

What did Ezekiel see above the living creatures?

From the last verse we see that they knew that the man on the throne was the Lord.

Long afterward the Apostle John had a similar vision, which is recorded in the fourth chapter of the book of Revelation.

Ezekiel's visions gave the good people among the captives hope that sometime they would be able to return to their homes.

It showed Ezekiel that the Lord was near His people taking care of them.

Junior

Do more in this class with the historical position of the four Major Prophets and with the history of the fall of Judah. Discuss in general the office of prophet and what it meant to the people to have a prophet given to them in their captivity. Be familiar with the methods of revelation, as given in AC 6000, as the children may ask how the Lord spoke to the prophets. Then take up the literal details of Ezekiel's first vision, and the meaning and purpose of the vision as a whole.

You remember that when Hezekiah showed the messengers from Babylon all his treasures, Isaiah said to him, "Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord." (II Kings 20:17) This prophecy was fulfilled about a hundred years later. Of the seven kings of Judah who followed Hezekiah only one, Josiah, was good. Finally Babylon gained complete control of the kingdom. Under Jehoiakim King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon began to carry away to Babylon, in addition to the treasures, some of the most promising of the young men of Judah. Among these was Daniel (Daniel 1:1-6). After Jehoiakim died, his son Jehoiachin was himself carried to Babylon, together with all his family and "his officers, and the mighty of the land . . . and all the men of might, even seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, all that were strong and apt for war" (II Kings 24:15-16). The king of Babylon set up an uncle of Jehoiachin to rule in Judah, but when he also rebelled, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and carried away to Babylon all but the poorest of the people.

As we learn from the beginning of our chapter for today, Ezekiel was a priest and was among those carried away to Babylon, and in the fifth year after king Jehoiachin was brought there Ezekiel was called by the Lord to prophesy to the captives. He and Daniel, together with Isaiah and Jeremiah, are called the *Major Prophets* because their prophecies, as we find them in the Bible, are long books in comparison with the short books of the twelve *Minor Prophets*.

All the prophets whose messages are recorded in the Word were inspired by the Lord. They all heard the voice of the Lord speaking to them, and they all had visions as well. Most of us have strange dreams sometimes, and when we try to describe them afterward, other people find them very hard to picture. Our dreams usually are the result of conditions in our own minds and bodies and may have no special meaning, but the visions and dreams of the prophets, which seem equally strange to us, were given them by the Lord and did have a meaning. The prophets themselves seldom knew what this meaning was any more than did the people to whom they spoke, but they did know that they were to write them down, using just the words that were put into their minds to describe them. We know now that the inner meaning of these visions can be read, just as the meaning of the parables and all the other stories of the Word can, for they are written in the same language, the language of the correspondence of the things of nature to the things of the spirit which produce them. So the visions and messages which were recorded in the Word through the prophets are for our instruction and enlightenment, and when you are older, you will find what a wonderful study they are.

Read carefully our chapter for today.

What were the four faces of the living creatures?
How many wings did they have?
What were their feet like?
What did they have under their wings?
What did Ezekiel see beside them on the earth?
What were the wheels like?
How was their motion governed?
What did the wings sound like when they moved?
What did Ezekiel see above the living creatures?
And what was above the firmament?
Whom did he finally know this man on the throne to be?

This vision taught Ezekiel that the Lord was not far away but was always near and at work in the affairs of men. In the tenth chapter of this same book, when Ezekiel was carried in the spirit to Jerusalem, he saw the same vision again there. This time he called

the living creatures "the cherubim." Do you remember that on the cover or mercy seat of the ark Moses was commanded to place two golden cherubim and that the Lord promised to speak to the Israelites "from between the cherubim"? Now read Genesis 3:24.

What was the work of the cherubim there?

We may see that this vision which Ezekiel saw describes something which is not a mere temporary appearance, for many years later the Apostle John saw the same thing. Read Revelation 4. Here the cherubim are called "beasts" [KJV], which is unfortunate because we use the word *beast* in such a different way. Actually the Greek word translated "beast" means simply "living creature."

From all this we can see that the cherubim are symbolic figures picturing the power of the Lord to see and provide for all things. The Lord knows us through and through. Wherever we are and whatever we are doing, He is there taking care of us as well as we will let Him. The Psalmist says: "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there." (Psalm 139:8)

The captives in Babylon needed reassurance that even in their affliction and exile, their God was with them. Even though most of the people of Judah had turned from the Lord to idolatry, there were some good people left, and after some thirty-five chapters of reproof and denunciation of the wicked, Ezekiel is given a message of hope for the good, promising them that they would be restored to their own land and allowed to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. This prophecy was literally fulfilled, but its importance for us is in the fact that its real meaning concerns the heavenly character which the Lord is able to rebuild in us after we have done wrong, if only we will listen to Him and try to obey Him.

Intermediate

The lesson for this class is the general meaning in the spiritual sense of the captivity of Judah and of the first vision of Ezekiel in relation to that meaning. As many of the details of the vision can be explained as you have time for.

The attention of the class should be called to the mention of cherubim in other places in the Word.

Babylon, we may recall, represents the "love of dominion from the love of self." In simple language this means the feeling that everybody should do what we want. This feeling is natural to us in the beginning, for we are born selfish; but unless we are badly spoiled by our parents, we grow up knowing that it is wrong, and we learn to control it and even, with the Lord's help, acquire the new will of love to the Lord and the neighbor, which is regeneration. We have seen that the story of the Hebrew nation, as recorded in the Word, pictures this gradual change which is completed in the happy and peaceful reign of Solomon. But then we saw that even a regenerate man can still be tempted and that his temptation is to take into his mind all sorts of ideas which are foreign to his true purpose of serving the Lord. His very success "goes to his head." False ideas gradually get control of his mind: Assyria has carried Israel away into captivity. Then little by little the sense of his own importance steals away the goodness which the Lord has put into his heart: Babylon has carried away Judah. We should notice that Assyria was always attacking with armies, but Babylon stole in by pretending friendship.

The good king Hezekiah postponed the fall of Judah, just as we have times when we see our faults and reform for a time. But Hezekiah's son Manasseh undid all his father's good work. There was only one more good king in Judah—Josiah—and after he was killed in battle, things grew rapidly worse. Under king Jehoiakim Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, gained sufficient control to carry off to Babylon part of the treasures of the temple and several of the young princes, among whom was Daniel. Then after Jehoiakim died, Nebuchadnezzar came in again and carried off his son Jehoiachin, who had reigned only three months, with all his family and his officers and some eight thousand of the most able men of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar set up Jehoiachin's uncle Zedekiah as a sort of puppet ruler, but when he rebelled, Nebuchadnezzar put an end to the kingdom, destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, and

carried off all the rest of the people except the poorest, who were left to care for the fields and vineyards.

This history is the background of the life and work of the prophet Ezekiel. He was a priest, and was probably carried away among those who were taken with Jehoiachin. He tells us himself (Ezekiel 1:1-3) that he was placed in the land of Chaldea by the river Chebar, and that he received his call to be a prophet in the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity. The first twenty-four chapters of the book are visions of the evil state of the people and prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem was destroyed and after that for some fourteen years more Ezekiel was given visions of the doom which would fall eventually on the enemies of Judah, and then visions of the restoration to their own land of those who were faithful, ending with a long and detailed vision (chapters 40-48) of the new temple which would be built. For the people of Judah in captivity, these visions and promises had an encouraging literal meaning, but we know that they really picture the building of a new Church in the world and also the rebuilding of a heavenly character in us which is possible as long as we are here in this world, if we will only recognize our faults and try with the Lord's help to change. We should note that the visions of the Apostle John which are recorded in the book of Revelation are strikingly similar to some of Ezekiel's visions.

Our chapter is about Ezekiel's first vision. It was a strange one and, try as we may, we cannot picture in our own minds just what he saw. We know that even our own dreams—which are not visions—have a shifting quality that is hard to put into form afterward. In chapter 10, where Ezekiel tells of seeing the same living creatures again, he calls them "cherubim." We remember that "cherubim, and a flaming sword" were placed at the entrance to the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve were driven out, "to keep the way of the tree of life" (Genesis 3:24). And we remember the two golden figures of cherubim that were placed on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant, and that the Lord promised to speak to the people from between the cherubim.

The cherubim are symbolic figures and they usually picture divine providence,* especially as it works to protect goodness. You know that there is a difference between evil and sin. All selfish desires are evils and they have bad consequences. The Lord wants us to get rid of them. But we cannot overcome them all at once. If we should see them all, we should be so discouraged we should give up trying. So the Lord shows them to us one by one as He sees we are ready to fight them, and He hides from us the things we would not try to fight. For sin is doing things that we know to be wrong, and it is sin that really hurts our souls.

In Ezekiel's vision the cherubim had wings. Wings picture truth about heavenly things, which has the power to lift our thoughts above the world. The creatures had the hands of a man under their wings, and hands represent the power to accomplish. They had "straight" feet which sparkled like burnished brass. The feet, which walk on the ground, stand for our daily lives, and brass is the metal which pictures goodness in outward things. They had four faces. The face is the part of us which expresses our character; so the four faces of the cherubim express the Lord's character as we see it in the action of divine providence: the face of a man is intelligence; the face of a lion is the power of divine truth; the face of an ox is goodness in natural things; the face of an eagle is rationality, which sees from a great height. Then there are the wheels. Wheels are things which enable us to move rapidly from place to place and especially to transport things easily. In the vision they picture divine foresight, and that is why they were "full of eyes." And the fact that all this brightness and activity and sound came from the Lord was shown Ezekiel by the vision of the throne and the figure of the Lord upon it.

We may wish we could have such a vision; but, you know, we actually do have it with our minds whenever we remember that, no matter where we are or what state we are in, the Lord is always at hand, seeing us just as we are, and providing for us just the

*Cf., however, *Apocalypse Revealed* 239. —*Editor*

experiences which are most likely to check our wrongdoing and lead us to goodness.

Basic Correspondences

- cherubim = divine providence protecting
wings = truth which can lift us above the worldly plane of thinking
the hands = power to accomplish
the feet = the outward conduct
the face = the inner character
-

Senior

With this class more may be done with the nature of vision and prophecy and the methods of revelation. Stress the fact that only a knowledge of correspondence really "opens" the Prophets. Point out the timeless and universal character of Ezekiel's vision and discuss the details in relation to the general meaning.

The four Major Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, prophesied to the people of Judah over a period of about two hundred years, from a little over a century before the kingdom of Judah fell until well along in the period of the captivity. Isaiah, as we have seen, told Hezekiah that the kingdom was doomed, although its fall was delayed by Hezekiah's reforms and by those of one of the later kings, Josiah. The book of Jeremiah is full of condemnation and warning, and he lived to see Jerusalem and the temple destroyed.

The books of Ezekiel and Daniel are of a different character. The blow had fallen. The people had been carried away to Babylon, and warning was no longer in order. But on the other hand some of the people at least were more ready to listen when told of their evils. Jeremiah had been hated and bitterly persecuted for his prophecies. Ezekiel and Daniel were honored. It was a comfort to the people to feel that even in captivity in a foreign land they still had authentic prophets.

Ezekiel was apparently among those carried away with king

Jehoiachin in the first major captivity. Judah continued as a puppet state for another eleven years before Jerusalem and the temple were finally destroyed. So the first twenty-four chapters of Ezekiel were largely concerned with that coming destruction, but they were written, as he tells us himself (Ezekiel 1:1-3), from captivity, and to the captives who had already lost their country. Later Ezekiel was given a message for them which promised the return of the faithful and the rebuilding of the temple.

But we know that all the utterances of the prophets which were recorded in the Word were only in a very limited sense messages to the people of that day. Their real import is spiritual, and directed to men and women of all nations and times. Throughout the history of the Christian Church many devout students of the Bible have felt that the prophecies must have some hidden meaning. Their very strangeness shows that they were not meant to be taken literally, and their power is felt even in those passages which are least understandable in the letter. Without a knowledge of the law of correspondence, however, attempts at interpretation were fanciful and aroused among scholars an antipathy to what they called "allegorizing on Scripture" which makes it almost impossible today to get even a hearing among them for the truths concerning the spiritual sense revealed in the Second Coming.

But the law of correspondence makes it possible to read the prophets with ever-increasing understanding and reward. They speak, in the internal sense, to the human mind and heart, exposing and condemning evil, explaining the working of the Lord in the individual and in the world, and showing us the way to happiness and peace.

Take our chapter for today as an example. It was Ezekiel's first vision, and he was impelled by the spirit to describe it in detail, although it presented a strange picture. The first thing which helps us to understand it is to note the fact that the "living creatures" when seen again by Ezekiel (chapter 10) are called "cherubim" and that the "beasts" [KJV] seen by the Apostle John long afterward (Revelation 4) were the same symbolic figures. (The Greek

word translated “beasts” means simply “living creatures.”) Swedenborg’s explanation that the cherubim picture divine providence in one of its special functions—that of protecting the highest or celestial good from profanation—is borne out by the other mentions of cherubim in the Word, such as the cherubim placed at the entrance of the Garden of Eden after the fall “to keep the way of the tree of life,” and the two golden figures of cherubim which were by command placed on the mercy seat of the ark.

When we think of this vision of Ezekiel as a representation of the marvelous ever-present activity of divine providence in the affairs of men, all the details fall into order. How hard it is for us to understand divine providence! It comes to us as “a whirlwind out of the north, a great cloud,” inscrutable at first but gradually revealing the divine love that is within it, the fire and brightness. We see that it applies to every phase of our lives—the four faces. It comes with spiritual truths which like wings are capable of lifting us above the plane of worldly and natural thinking. Yet it enters into the details of our daily living—its feet are on the ground. The hands under the wings are the power of spiritual truth for accomplishment in our lives. Compare verse 14 with Matthew 24:27. The wheels—the symbols of the intelligence which facilitates action and reaction—are “full of eyes round about”; the Lord sees and knows everything we are and have been and the results of our choices to eternity. It is not until near the end of the vision that the noise of the wings is mentioned. In the Bible the voice of the Lord is twice said to be like the sound of many waters (Ezekiel 43:2, Revelation 1:15), and we know that this means divine truth speaking to our minds. At first it is a confused noise, but gradually what it is saying becomes clear to us. Ezekiel becomes conscious of an actual voice and of the appearance of a throne above the cherubim and “the appearance of a man above upon it” surrounded by color and brightness and finally by the rainbow, which is “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.” Then the Lord speaks to Ezekiel giving him the first message he is to carry to the people.

Ezekiel, like the many devout people who have read the chapter since, did not have to understand the meaning of the details of this vision in order to feel certain of its source and to recognize its impelling power. He knew that he was being given a glimpse of the supernatural forces at work in the affairs of men, and that when the Lord spoke to him, he must obey. Today men do not need to see supernatural visions. The Word is finished and is given to us to study, and its meaning has been opened. It is with our rational minds that we now recognize the working of divine providence in the world and look to the Lord for instruction and guidance from day to day.

Adult

Center the discussion on the general meaning of the cherubim, illustrating it from other parts of the Word. Swedenborg's statement of the various methods of revelation (AC 6000) is another good subject. Still another is the distinction between the prophet's message to the people of his time and its universal meaning.

The kingdom of Judah lasted only a little over a century after the death of Hezekiah. All the later kings were evil except one, Josiah. They were in constant difficulty, for Egypt was at war with Assyria and Judah lay between. But Babylon was their final conqueror. In Daniel 1:3-6 we learn that in the third year of Jehoiakim, when Nebuchadnezzar gained control of Judah, he carried to Babylon part of the treasures of the temple and also some of the most promising of the young princes, of whom Daniel was one. This is not mentioned in the books of Kings, but II Kings 24:10-16 does tell us that several years before the final destruction of Jerusalem the king of Babylon carried away captive Jehoiakim's son and successor Jehoiachin, together with his family and his officers and the mighty of the land, "and all the men of might, even seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, all that were strong and apt for war." Ezekiel was probably one of those removed at this time, and our chapter shows us that he was settled with a group of captives in Chaldea by the river Chebar.

He was a priest, the son of Buzi. He tells us himself that his first vision came to him in the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity. This was several years before the destruction of Jerusalem, and chapters 1 to 24 of Ezekiel are concerned with prophecies of this event. The king of Judah during this period was Zedekiah, an uncle of Jehoiachin, who had been set up as a puppet ruler by Nebuchadnezzar, but rebelled and brought about the final catastrophe. After the destruction of Jerusalem, when all the rest of the people except the "poorest" were also carried away, Ezekiel continued to prophesy for at least fourteen more years, about twenty years in all. He is called "the prophet of the captivity."

The book of Ezekiel is full of strange visions which have puzzled Bible commentators throughout the history of the Church. They have a striking similarity to the visions of John in the book of Revelation, and like those visions have been subject to all sorts of interpretations and applications. The law of correspondences revealed through Swedenborg is the only key which can unlock the mysteries of these two books and lead to a consistent and reasonable interpretation. In the first twenty-four chapters Ezekiel is told to do strange things and is told that these are symbolic of the character of Judah and of what will happen to Jerusalem and its people; the complete destruction and desolation of Jerusalem is foretold. Then follow eight chapters of judgment upon various foreign nations, similar to chapters 46 to 50 of Jeremiah. Chapters 43 to 48 foretell the restoration, ending with a long, detailed vision of the Holy City and the temple. So again in Ezekiel the prophet's mission is exemplified—judgment, warning for the evil, and promise of salvation for the good.

Swedenborg tells us (AE 619³) that the reason why Ezekiel and John were given such searching visions of the inner conditions of men and of the Lord's dealings with them through the medium of the spiritual world was that "the prophets Ezekiel and John represent the doctrine of truth and the Word, therefore the exploration was made by them." The visions of Isaiah and Jeremiah at the time of their call to the Lord's mission (Isaiah 6 and Jeremiah 1)

are simple and comprehensible in the letter as compared to this first vision of Ezekiel.

The key to the understanding of our chapter lies in recognizing that the living creatures were what elsewhere in the Word are called "cherubim." Indeed Ezekiel himself (chapter 10:20) tells us so. Cherubim generally picture divine providence protecting holy things against profanation. We recall the cherubim which were placed at the gate of the Garden of Eden "to keep the way of the tree of life," and the cherubim on the mercy seat above the ark. Cherubim are not a race of created heavenly beings, as the Church in the past has imagined. They are always symbolic figures. So our first impulse to try to picture for ourselves just what Ezekiel saw is not very productive, and instead we should give our attention to the symbolic details which he records. Swedenborg explains all these details in connection with John's vision of the four beasts (Revelation 4:6-8) in AE 276-86. It is necessary to note that the Greek word translated "beasts" [KJV] means simply "living creatures" and would be better so translated on account of our modern connotation of the word "beast."

As Ezekiel was called to examine into and record the perverted state of the Church, it was altogether fitting that his call should be accompanied by a vision of the Lord's providence protecting holy things from such profanation. A brief outline of the vision and its meaning is all we can provide in these notes, but it may form a basis for thought.

First there is the general impression of the Lord's power and love, the whirlwind and fire. These assume to the evil a terrifying aspect since their object is to destroy evil. Then follow the specific representations of the operation of this power and love through divine providence, the four living creatures. The protecting power of divine providence has four aspects—the four faces. On the right side, the side of clear perception, are the face of a man, picturing divine wisdom, and the face of a lion, "the good of love and truth thence derived in their power" (AC 6367). On the left side, the side of relative obscurity, are the face of an ox, "natural good,"

and the face of an eagle, "the rational" (AC 3901⁵). Except by means of these things men cannot approach the holy things of the Lord's kingdom. The wings picture spiritual truths, which both lift and protect. The hands of a man under the wings picture the Lord's power to carry out the truth, and the feet are the ultimate expression of that truth in conduct. "For 'feet' in general signify the natural; a 'straight foot' the natural in respect to good; 'the sole of the foot,' the ultimate of the natural; 'burnished brass,' also signifies good in the natural. From this it is clear that good in the natural is signified by a 'calf,' and that in this is the ultimate good that guards and protects lest the heavens be approached except through the good of love and charity" (AE 279²). A wheel signifies the power of advancing, and thus the understanding, by means of which we progress in the truth and in right living. The wheels appearing beside the living creatures, which went when the living creatures went and stayed when they stayed because the spirit of life was in them, picture the "Divine intelligence, or foresight." Hence they were full of eyes (AC 8215). And above all appeared the Lord upon His throne.

It is significant that Ezekiel was given this vision before he was allowed to view the depths to which the human race had fallen. John was given a similar vision before he was permitted to see the devastation of the earth. These general truths apply to our regeneration. We are never tempted beyond our power to resist [I Corinthians 10:13]. Our eyes are not opened to see the deep evils within us before we have had a vision of the Lord's protecting and saving power. We cannot fight against our temptations if we doubt the omniscience and omnipotence of divine providence. We may not be able to see why things happen to us and to others, but we are sure that they do not happen without the Lord's knowledge and permission, and that behind the permission are perfect love and perfect wisdom.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 600¹⁴: "The faces of the man and the lion were

seen 'on the right side' because 'man' signifies Divine truth in light and intelligence, and a 'lion' Divine truth in power therefrom, such as it is in heaven in the south; and the face of the ox was seen 'on the left side,' to signify the good of truth in obscurity, for an 'ox' signifies the good of the natural man, which is in obscurity in those who in heaven dwell in the north."

Arcana Coelestia, n. 3901⁵: "That the 'face of an eagle' is circumspection and consequently Providence is manifest; for the cherubs represented by the living creatures in Ezekiel signify the Providence of the Lord lest man should enter into the mysteries of faith from himself and his own rational . . . This shows that when it is predicated of a man, the 'eagle' is in the internal sense the rational; and this for the reason that the eagle flies high, and from above has a wide view of the things that are below."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. Who are the four Major Prophets? *Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel*
- J. Where did Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesy? *Judah*
- J. Where did Ezekiel and Daniel prophesy? *Babylon*
- J. What office besides prophet did Ezekiel hold? *priest*
- J. After he was taken captive, where did he live? *by the river Chebar*
- P. How was he first shown that he was to be a prophet? *vision*
- P. How many living creatures did he see? *four*
- P. How many faces did each one have? *four*
- P. What were the faces? *man, lion, ox, eagle*
- J. What were their feet like? "*straight*," *soles like calves' hoofs*
- J. What did they have under their wings? *human hands*
- P. What went on the earth beside them? *wheels*
- J. How did they move? *with the creatures*
- J. What did the noise of their wings sound like? *rushing water, thunder, army*
- P. What did Ezekiel see above the living creatures? *throne*
- P. Who sat on the throne? *the Lord*
- J. By what other name did Ezekiel afterward call the living creatures? *cherubim*
- P. Where have we heard of cherubim before? *Garden of Eden, ark of the covenant*
- S. What do cherubim represent? *divine providence protecting holy things from profanation*

EZEKIEL'S VISION OF THE WATERS

Ezekiel 47:1-12

Information concerning the Major Prophets in general should be reviewed before anything is done with the chapter from Ezekiel.

Doctrinal Points

All truth comes from the Lord.

The Word contains deeper and deeper meanings—its three senses. If truth is to produce good, it must come from the Lord through the Word.

Good works must have in them recognition of the Lord.

Notes for Parents

This lesson is also on the “Major Prophets,” with a particular passage in Ezekiel as a center of our thought. There are, we recall, four Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. They are called *Major* only because their books are much longer than those of the twelve Minor Prophets, which follow them in our Bible. Isaiah lived in Judah in the time of king Hezekiah. Jeremiah also lived in Judah and began to prophesy not long before Judah was captured by Babylon. He witnessed the fall of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, but was not himself carried to Babylon, and he continued to prophesy to the people who were left. Ezekiel and Daniel were both among those carried away to Babylon, and began to prophesy in captivity.

The story we are reading in Ezekiel 47:1-12 is part of a long vision Ezekiel had in the twenty-fifth year of the captivity—his last vision. In the vision he was taken back to the Holy Land and was led all through the temple by an angel who measured everything as they went. Then he was given a vision of a river coming out of the temple. The account of this river is very striking and it has a beautiful meaning for us. For the river is divine truth as it comes down

to us from the Lord in His Word. If we are to understand the Bible at all, we must first see that the Lord speaks to us through it. Then we can study it and learn more and more of its meaning, and at last we shall come to realize that it can never be exhausted. There will always be more there for us to find. So in Ezekiel's vision the waters became deeper and deeper as he went on. And everywhere the river came it brought life and healing except to the "miry places" and marshes. The only things in our lives which the Lord cannot make pure and whole by means of the Word are those evils and weaknesses which we cling to and do not want to recognize or correct. When we study the Word and let it show us our faults so that we can fight against and overcome them, the Word brings us life and happiness and peace.

The river that Ezekiel saw is the same river that watered the Garden of Eden and the same river that John saw in Revelation, "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." And you remember what the Psalmist writes: "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High."

Primary

Even with the youngest children this lesson may be taught as a parable about the Bible. As a parable it is simple and clear, and young children's perceptions are sometimes very keen. Follow the outline suggested, trying to impress upon the minds of the children the details of Ezekiel's vision.

After Josiah died, the kingdom of Judah was conquered by Babylon, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, and all the people were carried away into captivity in Babylon except some of the poor people who were left to take care of the fields and vineyards.

While they were in captivity, two great prophets were raised up among them. One of these was Ezekiel, a priest. He was given many strange visions which showed him the Lord's power and how

important it is to worship the Lord and to study what He teaches us in His Word.

The other Major Prophets were Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel.

Isaiah lived in Judah in the time of Hezekiah.

Do you remember what finally happened to Judah?

Jeremiah lived through the time of Judah's fall.

He was not carried away to Babylon but later was taken to Egypt and died there.

Ezekiel and Daniel were both among those who were carried away to Babylon.

Their prophecies were given to them there.

Ezekiel had many strange visions.

In one of Ezekiel's visions he was taken back to Jerusalem and shown the temple just as it had been before it was destroyed. Then he was shown something else.

Outside of the temple he saw something new.

What did he see coming out from under the eastern entrance.

What did the angel with him have in his hand?

How deep were the waters after the first thousand cubits?

How deep were they after the second?

How deep were they after the third?

Then how deep did they become?

What were growing on either side of the river?

What were found in the waters?

What happened to everything to which the waters came?

What happened to the places to which the waters could not bring life?

The wonderful river which Ezekiel saw in his vision was not the kind of river which we can see with our eyes in this world. It was a picture of how the Lord teaches us in His Word. At first we have only a very little understanding of what the Lord is saying to us as we read the Word. This is like the shallow water at the beginning. But if we go on studying it and trying to live as the Lord wants us to live, we get more and more understanding, and finally we become wise enough to know that we can go on studying the Word forever and always learn more and more. So the waters of the river became deep enough to swim in.

Then Ezekiel was allowed to see how everything came to life where the river flowed, just as our lives become happy and useful

when we live as the Lord teaches us in His Word.

Junior

This lesson, like the one on Psalm 91, is a good one in which to introduce the Juniors to the thought of the presence of the spiritual sense in every detail of the letter of the Word.

Who finally conquered Judah?
What happened to the people?

The second of the Major Prophets, Jeremiah, lived through the period of the fall of Judah. He had warned the people of what would happen to them if they continued in their evil ways, and he had advised them to submit and pay tribute to Babylon so that they might be allowed to stay in their own land. For this reason, when the people were carried away, the king of Babylon allowed Jeremiah to remain in his own home along with the "poor" who were to take care of the fields and vineyards. Jeremiah continued to prophesy, and he urged the remaining people to stay quietly at home and wait for the Lord to deliver them. But the people were afraid, and a group of them decided to flee into Egypt. They took Jeremiah with them against his will and he is thought to have died in Egypt. The last part of the book of Jeremiah and the book of Lamentations were written in Egypt.

Ezekiel and Daniel were among those carried away captive into Babylon. Our next lesson will be about Daniel. From the first few verses of the book of Ezekiel we learn that Ezekiel was a priest and that he began to prophesy in the fifth year of the captivity. He was given many wonderful visions and was shown the fate of other nations beside his own. And he was allowed to tell the captives that the faithful among them would someday be permitted to return to their own land. He himself apparently did not live to see the return, but this is not surprising, as he was grown up when he was taken to Babylon and the captivity lasted seventy years.

Our lesson today is a part of Ezekiel's last vision, which was given him in the twenty-fifth year of the captivity. He was taken

in the spirit to Jerusalem. Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed, but Ezekiel was allowed to see a vision of the temple still standing just as he must have remembered it. An angel was sent to show him through the temple. Read about him in Ezekiel 40:3. As they went, the angel measured everything. We find that Ezekiel's vision fits exactly with the description of the temple when Solomon built it, and adds many important details. After everything was measured, the angel brought him to the door of the temple, which was toward the east. The tabernacle, too, had always been set up with the entrance toward the east.

What did Ezekiel see coming out from under the threshold?

From which side of the altar did the waters come?

How deep were the waters after the first thousand cubits?

How deep were they after the second thousand?

How deep were they after the third thousand?

How deep did they finally become?

What grew on the banks of the river?

What happened to everything to which the river came?

Who stood on the banks of the river?

How long would the fruit and leaves of the trees last?

What was the fruit said to be for?

What were the leaves for?

What happened to the places to which the river could not come?

When you are older, you will understand some of the wonderful lessons which this vision of Ezekiel teaches us, but you are old enough now to know that the river is a picture of the Word. The Word comes to us from the Lord, just as the river seemed to flow from the altar in the temple. At first we understand only the outside meaning of the Word—pictured by the water up to the ankles. But as we grow older and keep studying it, its meaning is seen to go deeper and deeper, until finally we realize that no one can ever exhaust it. We can study it forever and always learn more and more. The fishermen on the banks are like us when we are drawing truths to live by out of the Word. The trees are like the great principles we learn from it which lead us to do good; the fruit is the good we do. And their leaves are the thoughts which come from

these principles, which show us our faults and how to correct them. They can make our souls healthy, just as medicine can cure our bodies. The only part of our souls which the Word cannot make alive and well is the part we are not willing to change. The selfish feelings and thoughts which we love so much that we cling to them even when we know they are wrong are the swamps and salt marshes.

If you can read this story in the Word and see this deeper meaning in it, perhaps you have reached the point where the waters are to the knees.

Intermediate

The details of this vision of the waters are for the most part correspondences with which the Intermediates are already familiar. The teacher would do well, therefore, to see how far the class itself can go with the interpretation before beginning his own instruction. This lesson is a striking story in the letter and a powerful one in its spiritual sense.

Of the four Major Prophets, the first two lived in the kingdom of Judah. Isaiah, as you may remember, was the prophet through whom the Lord spoke to king Hezekiah. Jeremiah lived in the last days of Judah, prophesied its end, and saw his prophecies fulfilled. He was among those allowed by the king of Babylon to remain in their homes, and he continued to prophesy, but later was taken to Egypt against his will by some of the people who were afraid to stay in their own land. His last prophecies and perhaps the five poems which make up the book of Lamentations were given him in Egypt. Ezekiel and Daniel were both carried away with the captives to Babylon and prophesied in captivity. The ancient Hebrews, believing that prophetic inspiration could be given only in the Holy Land, never included either Lamentations or Daniel in their Scripture canon, but they did accept the book of Ezekiel, perhaps because Ezekiel was already a priest when he was taken captive and because he was carried in the spirit to Jerusalem.

One of Ezekiel's visions of Jerusalem is the subject of our lesson

for today. Ezekiel began to prophesy five years after the beginning of the captivity. Our lesson is part of his last vision, given him in the twenty-fifth year of the captivity. In it he was carried into the land of Israel and set upon a very high mountain by or upon which "was as the frame of a city on the south." There a man came to him "whose appearance was like the appearance of brass, with a line of flax in his hand, and a measuring reed." This man took him through the temple, measuring every part of it. The description of it is given in chapters 40-46, and this description has been found to fit well with the more general description of Solomon's temple found in II Kings. Then follows the vision of the waters in chapter 47.

Many parts of the books of the Prophets are hard for us to understand without a great deal of careful study, but this vision is both beautiful in its letter and very clear in its meaning, since it contains so many correspondences already familiar to us. Water, we know, is the symbol of truth, and the waters flowing from beside the altar in the temple are truth from the Lord, or the Word. See how every little detail in the letter of the Word is important: the waters flowed from the right side of the altar and the right side always pictures the side of love or affection—the Word is given us by the Lord in love for us; the right side is also said to be the south side, the temple facing east, because the south corresponds to spiritual intelligence, and the Word is given us to bring us a knowledge of God and spiritual things. But then Ezekiel was brought outside of the temple and brought about northward—the north is spiritual obscurity—until he came to the "utter" gate by the way "that looketh eastward." Isn't this just what happens to all of us? When we are little children, we are told and we at once believe that the Bible is the Lord's Word and that the Lord loves us and wants us to learn about Him. Then we go to school and become absorbed in learning about the world and in our work and play, and often our first belief becomes dim and we are not so interested in Sunday school. But if we keep going, we come back after a while to a point where we begin again to want knowledge of the Lord—the "utter gate by the way that looketh eastward," for the east

always represents where the Lord is—and there are the waters flowing out again on the right side.

Then when we really begin to study the Word—to follow the waters—they become deeper and deeper. In the Word we often find the numbers ten, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, and even ten thousand times ten thousand. They all picture “fullness of state.” That means the time when we have passed through a certain stage—like our “teens,” for example—and are all ready for the next. So each thousand cubits brings us to a new and deeper understanding of the Word. At first we see what the literal sense teaches us about what we should and should not do in this world; that is like the waters to the ankles. Later we find that it has a spiritual sense which teaches us about our souls and how we should think and feel; this is the waters to the knees. Then we begin to see a little of the celestial sense, which tells us how the Lord thought and felt when He was in the world, and as we see His great love for us, we begin to feel true love for Him and the desire to serve Him in all things; this is the water to the loins. Finally we realize that there is no end to what we can learn from the Word. We can go on studying it forever: “waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over.”

It is easy to see, too, why the banks of the river were lined with fruit trees “whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit be consumed.” We may remember from the Creation story that fruit trees picture true principles by means of which we can do genuinely good works, deeds which are spiritually living because the Lord’s unselfish love is in them. As the river of truth must come from the Lord, so all good works must come from Him because He alone is good and truth. Also, fish in a good sense represent affections for natural knowledges for the sake of use. So when we love to study the letter of the Word for the sake of knowing better how to serve the Lord, we are like the fishermen standing on the banks of the river casting their nets and drawing in fish, “exceeding many.”

It is because the Word comes from the Lord and has within it His love and wisdom that it is said that “everything that liveth,

which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live." Our life does not come from ourselves but from the Lord, and any part of us which we try to hold back from the Lord's guidance is like the "miry places" and marshes "given to salt" because in those things we have no desire to do as truth teaches.

Finally, here is something for you to think out for yourself: Remembering that a tree pictures a principle and its leaves thoughts coming from that principle, why is the leaf of the trees by the river said to be "for healing"?

Basic Correspondences

- | | |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| measuring reed | = ability to measure state of church |
| line of flax | = truth pure and genuine |
| south | = spiritual intelligence |
| north | = spiritual obscurity |
| fish nets | = means of instruction |
-

Senior

This is an opportunity to impress upon the young people the fact that it is only as we see the world as the Lord's creation and the Bible as the Lord's Word to men that we can come to any true understanding of life or use our talents and knowledges as they are meant to be used in the service of the Lord and the neighbor.

We call Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel the Major Prophets not because they are relatively more important than the twelve Minor Prophets, but simply because the books are much longer. Isaiah prophesied in Judah in the days of Hezekiah and the three kings who preceded him. Jeremiah lived to witness the captivity but was not carried to Babylon. Ezekiel and Daniel prophesied in captivity.

Ezekiel's prophecies, by his own testimony, were given over a period of twenty years, from the fifth to the twenty-fifth year of the captivity. The last one, from which our lesson is taken, is recorded in chapters 40 to 48. In this vision he was taken back to the Holy Land and conducted through the temple by an angel who

carried a line of flax and a measuring reed and measured everything as they went. The measurements tally with those given in the less detailed description of Solomon's temple in II Kings. Through chapter 46 we might think that Ezekiel was having a dream of something which had been very familiar to him, for he was one of the priests (Ezekiel 1:3).

But in chapter 47 something enters the picture which Ezekiel had never seen in the days before the captivity. The waters proceeding from under the threshold of the house eastward, which were seen to come from the right side of the house at the south side of the altar, picture divine truth given us by the Lord in love. We receive this truth through the Word; so we think of the river of Ezekiel's vision as the Word. It is this truth in the Word by means of which we have spiritual life.

Our reception of truth in the Word, however, depends first on our acknowledgment that the Word is from the Lord and secondly upon the preparation we make for understanding it through our study and through the use we make of it in our lives. You notice that there were some places—the “miry places” and marshes—to which the river did not bring life, but which were to be “given to salt.” Salt in a good sense represents the element which unites truth to goodness, the desire to live as truth teaches; in a bad sense it represents the lack of this desire. That was why Lot’s wife, when she looked back toward the wicked city of Sodom, was turned into a pillar of salt. In our lives there are always some selfish feelings and thoughts which we are unwilling to give up even though we know they are wrong. These are our “salt marshes,” to which the river cannot bring life. We can receive only as much truth as we are willing to use.

The river of truth in the Word deepens as we progress in regeneration, and enables us to do more and more good. The trees by the river bank brought forth fruit which never failed and leaves which did not fade. The leaves are the thoughts which grow out of the principles we establish in our lives as we progress in spiritual intelligence. And the leaves were for healing. It is by means of these

thoughts that we can see and correct the faults and weaknesses which are the diseases of the soul.

One thing more the river does for us. It makes all the natural knowledges in our minds living and useful. We have only to stand on the banks and fish them out. The man who sees clearly that all good and truth come from the Lord and nothing from himself, and who studies the Word to see what the Lord is saying to him in it so that he may direct his life rightly is never misled by appearances or frustrated by disappointments, but lives a full, happy, useful life whatever his outward circumstances may be.

Adult

Perhaps the best lesson for the Adults is a discussion of our personal responsibility for our progress in spiritual intelligence. The Lord gave the Word and in His Second Coming opened its inner meaning, but His truth can do us no good unless we are willing to study and use it.

In a Sunday school course it is not possible to do much with the Prophets. The greater part of these books requires advanced study. And yet we all receive a powerful impression from hearing the Prophets read. In the Psalms and Prophets more than in the historical books—probably because there is often no story to hold our attention in the natural sense—we seem to feel the Lord speaking, even though we may not always understand the message. One cannot help pitying the person who has allowed himself to be misled into the belief that the Bible is the product of men and who studies the Prophets only to discover what Isaiah or Jeremiah or Ezekiel meant by the words he wrote. Certainly the prophets themselves had no thought that their words were their own. Nowhere else in the Word do we so constantly read “Thus saith the Lord,” “The Lord said unto me,” “The Lord showed me,” and “The word of the Lord came unto me, saying.”

We should have no doubt that it is the Lord who is speaking to us as we read the Prophets. Here and there the message comes through clearly even in the letter, as for example in Micah 6:8, but

for the most part we must study the spiritual sense if we are to be instructed as well as emotionally affected.

Swedenborg explained verse by verse only the books of Genesis, Exodus, and Revelation. But in the incomplete manuscript *Prophets and Psalms*, published posthumously, he gives us a summary explanation of each of the Psalms and of each chapter in the Prophets. Beside this the writings are full of quotations from the Prophets, often with quite detailed explanation. So if one is willing to make the effort, it is possible to get at the spiritual meaning of the Prophets without guesswork or the use of one's own imagination. In the past, without the knowledge given us by the Lord in His Second Coming, men sometimes went very far astray in trying to interpret passages in the Prophets according to their imaginations. In this course we are able only to give the children some general idea of the Prophets and to give the adults one or two examples of what we can learn when we "dig in" to the study of any particular chapter or passage.

The passage chosen as our example today is a striking and beautiful picture in the letter. It is part of Ezekiel's last vision, given him in the twenty-fifth year of the captivity. For Ezekiel the priest was one of those carried away captive to Babylon with king Jehoiachin in the first great deportation from Judah. In this last vision Ezekiel was taken back to the Holy Land, where upon a high mountain he saw "as the frame of a city on the south." Here he was met by a man "whose appearance was like the appearance of brass" with a line of flax and a measuring reed in his hand, who conducted him through the temple, measuring each part as he went. This (chapters 40-46) is the description of the temple to which we referred in an earlier lesson, the description which the Rev. T. O. Paine found to be the complement of the description of Solomon's temple in II Kings.

Knowing as we do that the temple represents the dwelling place of the Lord in each of us, or a true spiritual character centered around worship of the Lord and obedience to the commandments, and that water is the symbol of truth, we recognize immediately

that the waters issuing from the temple on the right side or the south side of the altar are a picture of divine truth given us by the Lord in love to bring us into a state of spiritual intelligence. We know, too, that divine truth can be given us only as we read the letter of the Word with the acknowledgment that it is from the Lord and with a desire to obey its teachings. That is, truth comes from the Lord alone and flows by influx into the knowledges of the Word in the mind of a good person.

Swedenborg's summary of the meaning of these twelve verses in *Prophets and Psalms* reads as follows: "Influx of Divine good and Divine truth from the Lord; from this influx the angels of the three heavens, and men, have spiritual life, and from the Divine good and Divine truth they have intelligence and charity."

Our "river" of divine truth is the Word. As we progress in regeneration we are enabled by the Lord to find deeper and deeper truths in it. In AE 629 we are told that the ankles signify what is sensual and natural, the knees what is spiritual and natural, and the loins the marriage of truth and good. It is the same progression seen in the interpretation of Saul, David, and Solomon, culminating in the peaceful and wise state of loving the truth for the sake of use. When we reach that state, depths of truth in the Word can be revealed to us which we were not prepared to see before. See below for a description of the final state.

The trees along the banks stand for true principles understood by means of the Word. Their fruit represents good works done from unselfish love and therefore genuine and lasting. Their leaves picture spiritually rational ideas, which are able to show us our evils and weaknesses and so lead to the healing of the soul. The fish in the river are all our natural knowledges which are given vitality and made serviceable when they are seen in relation to the divine plan and purpose.

So through Ezekiel we are given a concrete view of our spiritual possibilities. If we see that the Word comes from the Lord and continue to study it with the help of the means given us by the Lord in His Second Coming, it will bring life and blessing to every

part of our experience. The only limitations to our spiritual development are of our own making. The swamps and marshes will continue to be without life and will be "given to salt." The selfish feelings and thoughts to which we cling, knowing them to be wrong yet unwilling to apply to them the healing "medicine" of truth, cannot be reclaimed.

The Psalmist writes, "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved." This is the same river of Ezekiel's vision, the same river which flowed out of Eden, and the same "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal" which John saw "proceeding out of the throne of god and of the Lamb." And the Lord through John says to each one of us: "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 3424: "The 'river' is the Word; the 'waters which cause everything to live' are the Divine truths contained in it; the 'fish' are memory-knowledges."

Apocalypse Explained, n. 629⁸: "How intelligence increases by the reception of Divine truth proceeding from the Lord is described by the 'waters' which the prophet passed through . . . 'the waters to the ankles' signify such intelligence as the sensual and natural man has, for 'ankles' signify what is sensual and natural; 'the waters to the knees' signify such intelligence as the spiritual-natural man has, for 'knees' signify what is spiritual-natural; 'the waters to the loins' signify such intelligence as the spiritual man has, for the 'loins' signify the marriage of truth and good, which is spiritual; 'the waters that could not be passed through' signify celestial intelligence, which is called wisdom, such as the celestial man or an angel of the third heaven has."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. Where did Ezekiel and Daniel prophesy? *in Babylon*
- P. Where was Ezekiel taken in his final vision? *Jerusalem*
- J. What did his angel guide first measure? *the temple*

- P. What did he then see which was not in the temple as he had known it?
water
- J. How far did the angel measure the river each time? *a thousand cubits*
- J. What were the three depths at which Ezekiel was allowed to cross it?
ankle, knee, loins
- P. How deep did it finally become? *over his head*
- P. What grew beside the river? *trees*
- P. Who stood upon its banks? *fishermen*
- J. What happened to everything the river touched? *became healthy*
- J. Was there any place to which it did not bring life? *marshes*
- J. What was done with such places? *left to salt*
- P. What were the leaves of the trees for? *healing*
- P. What does the river picture? *the Word*
- I. What are pictured by (1) leaves, and (2) fruit? (1) *good thoughts*, (2) *good deeds*
- S. How must we think of the Word and use it if we wish to understand it more and more deeply all the time? *the inexhaustible Word of God to us*

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

Daniel 2

Remind the older classes that the book of Daniel, like the book of Psalms, is not in the Hebrew canon of Scripture but was given a proper place in the Word for Christians by the Lord Himself. For the younger children a reminder of the fall of Judah and the carrying away of the people to Babylon will lead into the story of Daniel.

Doctrinal Points

Divine providence controls history.

Revelation was often given to the prophets in dreams.

True faith comes from the Lord.

Humility is essential to charity.

Notes for Parents

After the good king Josiah died, the people of Judah went back to their evil ways, and the time soon came when they could no longer be protected by the Lord. First the king of Egypt came in and made them pay tribute to him; then the king of Babylon took all the Holy Land away from the king of Egypt. For a time he allowed one or another of Josiah's sons to rule Judah under him, but they foolishly rebelled, and then Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and carried away to Babylon all but the poorest of the people.

The first of the people of Judah to be taken to Babylon—some time before the final destruction and deportation—were a group of the young princes, who were chosen, because of their ability and superior education, to be trained in all the learning of the Chaldeans, the native culture of Babylon, so that they could serve Nebuchadnezzar in special ways. One of these young princes was Daniel.

Many of the stories about Daniel are familiar to all of us. He was an outstanding example of the wisdom and courage which are developed through humility and obedience to the Lord. The story we have read for our lesson today tells how he came to be made one of the chief rulers of Babylon. It reminds us of the story of Joseph in Egypt. The account of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image is a striking one, and we can all see in it a picture of how one who thinks himself wise and great gradually loses his wisdom and goodness and eventually is seen to be worthless. Daniel interpreted the dream to Nebuchadnezzar in terms of the future history of Babylon, but its application is much wider than that. Everything in the Word of God has deeper and deeper meanings as we continue to study it.

There are some things in the story which we should notice especially. First Daniel prayed to the Lord to show him the truth he needed, and he asked his friends to pray too. Second, when he went before Nebuchadnezzar to tell him the dream, he took no credit to himself for his knowledge, but said plainly that it was the Lord who was revealing the truth. And because of this, after the dream was explained, Nebuchadnezzar not only gave Daniel riches and power but also acknowledged Daniel's God as the greatest of all gods. In our daily life and in our work for the church we should realize that we do not lead people to the Lord by calling attention to ourselves or by trying to appear better and wiser than others. As parents we should watch for and check in our children the little beginnings of this tendency—which is in all of us—to self-praise and the desire to rule.

Primary

The teacher should tell the children the beginning of the story of Daniel as we find it in chapter 1. Stress Daniel's courage in refusing to do what he had been taught was wrong, and the fact that the Lord can help us when we do right. This was the foundation of Daniel's becoming a great man. At the end of the lesson draw a parallel between Daniel and Joseph. See how much the children remember of the Joseph story.

Do you remember our story about good king Josiah who had the temple repaired, and how the book of the law was found and read to him? Josiah tried hard to do everything the Lord commanded in the book of the law, and he tried to make the people of Judah give up their evil ways and obey the Lord again. But the people had become too bad. After Josiah died, they went back to their same old evil ways and finally the Lord allowed the king of Babylon, whose name was Nebuchadnezzar, to conquer Judah and take most of the people away to Babylon.

Among the very first to be taken were some young princes. Nebuchadnezzar wanted some especially bright and well-educated young men who could be taught the language and the learning of the Chaldeans (the people of Babylon) and so be very useful to him.

One of these young men was Daniel. The king gave him the Chaldean name of Belteshazzar. Daniel was just the kind of person the king wanted, but he was also one of those who was determined to worship his own God. Even at the risk of offending the king he would not do anything he had been brought up to believe was wrong. So the Lord could be with him and he was very wise.

One night king Nebuchadnezzar had a strange dream.

In the morning he could not remember it.

None of his wise men could tell him what it was.

But Daniel prayed to the Lord and the Lord showed him what to tell the king.
What was the king's dream?

What were the different parts of the image made of?

What destroyed the image?

What happened to the stone afterward?

Daniel also told the king what the dream meant.

The king decided that Daniel's God must be the greatest god of all and that Daniel was the wisest man in his kingdom. So he made Daniel very rich and made him chief ruler under himself in the kingdom, just as the king of Egypt had made Joseph ruler of Egypt long before. But Daniel did not become proud, and always continued to obey the Lord in all things.

Junior

There are some good lessons in this chapter for Juniors. The example of Daniel, like that of Joseph, points to humility and trust in the Lord as the way to real success in life. In taking up the interpretation of the destruction of the image as Daniel gave it to Nebuchadnezzar, point out that the stone introduces a lasting kingdom which "the God of heaven" is to set up, and say that this image has deeper meanings which they will study when they are older. They can understand now that the only lasting kingdom is the rule of the Lord in our hearts and minds—the kingdom of heaven.

Even the great reforms which good king Josiah carried out could not make the people of Judah over into good people, and Judah was finally conquered by the king of Babylon and all but the poorest of the people were carried away into captivity in Babylon. Two of the four men whom we call the Major Prophets were among these captives. They were Ezekiel and Daniel. Look in your Bibles right after the book called *Solomon's Song* and see whose names are given to the next two books. These were the first two Major Prophets. The book called *Lamentations* is really just a continuation of *Jeremiah*.

Now write the names of the four Major Prophets in order.

They were called *Major* because their books are much longer than those of the twelve *Minor* Prophets which follow them.

Daniel was among the very first group to be carried away to Babylon. This was a very special group. Read about it in Daniel 1:1-7. So you see Daniel was really just a boy when he was taken away from his home. But Daniel and his three companions had already been taught carefully in the religion of their nation. The royal children in Judah were brought up under the care of the high priest. And these four young men were brave enough to remain true to their religion even in captivity. Read how they proved this in Daniel 1:8-16. Now read the last four verses of chapter 1. It often looks to us when we are being tempted as if doing right would bring us into difficulty and make us unhappy, but the fact is that it is only when we do right that the Lord can help us.

Our chapter for today reminds us of a story we had earlier. Let us see if you can remember it.

Who was sold into captivity in Egypt?
Why was the Lord able to prosper him?
What special ability did He give him?
What brought him to Pharaoh's attention?
What did he do for Pharaoh?
What office did Pharaoh give him?

See how close this is to Daniel's experience. You remember, too, that Pharaoh's dreams were pictures of something that was to happen to his nation.

What did Nebuchadnezzar see in his dream?
What metal was the head of the image made of?
What were the next two metals?
What were the legs made of?
What were the feet made of?
What was the weak spot in the image?
What destroyed the image?
What happened to the stone afterward?
What did Daniel say the golden head symbolized?
What were pictured by the other parts of the image?
What did the king do for Daniel?
What did Daniel do for his three friends?

There is something else in this story which we should notice particularly. Read Genesis 41:15-16. Now read Daniel 2:27-30. You see that both Joseph and Daniel wanted to be sure that the king knew that their wisdom was not their own but came from the Lord. And in verse 47 of our chapter we find that Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged that Daniel's God must be the greatest of the gods. And it was because he knew that God was with Daniel that he made him ruler in Babylon. Sometimes you will hear people say that a person must have a great deal of self-confidence if he wants to succeed in life. But if we think a little, we realize that we are always a little suspicious of people who think very highly of themselves, and that the people we really trust are those who are trying to do right and thinking of the welfare of other people. We must remember this when we are tempted to try to put ourselves ahead of other people or to despise someone who cannot do just what we can do or who disagrees with us. All our abilities come to us as

gifts from the Lord, and they are meant to be used in His service.

Intermediate

The story in itself is a powerful one, and the lessons to be drawn from the letter are important for this age group also. The spiritual meaning is a little beyond children of this age, but the evil represented by Babylon can be understood and should be stressed. The teacher will be able to think of examples of this evil which are within the experience of the class, for it rears its ugly head even on the playground and in the classroom.

In our lessons on the book of Psalms we noted that the ancient Hebrews did not include the Psalms in their canon of most sacred Scripture, but that the Lord Himself restored this book to its proper authority. The same is true of the book of Daniel. The Israelites classed it with their "Sacred Writings," which were not thought to be divinely inspired; but the Lord in Matthew 24:15 refers to Daniel as one of the Prophets. The four Major Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. They are called *Major* only because of the length of their books. The books of the twelve Minor Prophets are all short.

Daniel was one of the royal children in Judah in the days of Jehoiakim, the second son of Josiah to follow him on the throne. Jehoiakim was placed on the throne by the king of Egypt, who carried off to Egypt his older brother Jehoahaz, who had become king when Josiah died. But we learn from II Kings 24:1 that the king of Babylon began to besiege Jerusalem during Jehoiakim's reign and from II Kings 24:7 that at that time the king of Babylon took the control of the whole country away from the king of Egypt.

We should read the first chapter of Daniel as an introduction to our lesson for today. We learn from it that Daniel and his three friends—whom we know best by their Chaldee names of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—were among a group of royal children carried to Babylon because of their superior education and ability, to be brought up in the learning of the Chaldeans. So Daniel was one of the first captives taken to Babylon. We also learn that Daniel

and his three friends were brave enough to remain true to the religion in which they had been brought up, and that for this reason the Lord could prosper them and give them wisdom above their fellows, and that Daniel—like Joseph long before—was given “understanding in all visions and dreams.”

Before we study the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, let us notice a lesson which comes to us clearly in the letter of the story. Daniel, like Joseph (Genesis 41:16), did not attribute his wisdom to himself, but recognized and acknowledged openly that it came from the Lord. When he heard the decree of Nebuchadnezzar that the wise men should be killed, his immediate impulse was to turn to the Lord for guidance and help and to ask for the prayers of his friends also. So we have in Daniel an outstanding example of humility and trust in the Lord, as well as of obedience and courage. And the result of this humility was that Nebuchadnezzar afterward in raising Daniel to riches and honor also acknowledged that Daniel's God was “a God of gods, and a Lord of kings.” If we follow Daniel's example and do not take credit to ourselves for any goodness or wisdom we may have, we help to bring other people to a recognition of the Lord, and thus advance the kingdom of heaven. There is also in the letter the example of Daniel's desire to save the other wise men as well as himself and his friends (verse 24), and his immediate thought for his three friends when he came into power (verse 49).

Daniel is the only one of the Prophets who attained worldly success and prosperity. Our doctrines teach us that riches and honors do not hurt those who do not set their hearts on them, but recognize that they are given them as means to serve the Lord. We might note that we have testimony to Daniel's position in Babylon from Ezekiel, the other prophet whose message was given during the captivity (see Ezekiel 14:14 and 28:3). Daniel continued in high honor into the reign of Cyrus, under whom some of the Jews were allowed to return to the Holy Land. True and lasting honor is never attained except by one who is humble and God-fearing.

In the letter Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream as fore-

telling the future history of the people of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar would of course understand it in this way. All history is controlled by divine providence. As Daniel says in our chapter (verse 21), "He removeth kings, and setteth up kings." The history of that part of the country was one of successive conquest by different nations. In our Bible so far we have seen enemies first from that region called Syria, then Assyria, then Babylon, and before the end of the Old Testament we find Darius the Mede and then Cyrus the Persian ruling there. But even in the letter the final kingdom, which is to last forever, is said to be a kingdom set up by "the God of heaven." The kingdom of heaven is the only permanent kingdom.

In its spiritual meaning Nebuchadnezzar's image pictures the decline of the kind of church which is called Babylon. You remember from our lesson on king Josiah that Babylon represents "the love of dominion from the love of self." How can such a love be associated with a church? The answer is that the love of dominion is something which develops gradually and often is not recognized for a long time. Perhaps you remember from an earlier lesson that when messengers of the king of Babylon visited king Hezekiah, they said they came as friends because their king had heard that Hezekiah had been sick, and Hezekiah received them as friends and showed them all his treasures. And in our story of Daniel Nebuchadnezzar wanted young men brought from Judah who were "skillful in all wisdom," and after Daniel interpreted his dream, he was willing to acknowledge Daniel's God. This is why Nebuchadnezzar can be called the head of gold of the image, for the head represents wisdom and gold the good of love to the Lord. In the beginning a person in whom the love of dominion lies hidden may be eager for knowledge of the Lord and active in worship and good deeds. But as the love of dominion begins to assert itself, the person first loses love to the Lord although he still loves the knowledge he has acquired. This is the breast and arms of silver. Then he comes to think that if he does outward good works, he is necessarily a good person and to be praised. This is the belly and

thighs of brass. Then he stops doing good works but thinks he is good because he is perhaps a member of the church and knows its teachings. This is the legs of iron. But by this time a great deal of falsity has become mixed up with his religion. His conduct is directed partly according to true principles and partly by false ones, and the two do not hold together. This is the feet part of iron and part of clay. In the light of genuine truth—the stone cut out without hands—there is then nothing left of his goodness and wisdom. Nebuchadnezzar's image is really a picture of the whole history of mankind who in the beginning, you remember, were in love to the Lord, but gradually turned toward themselves and lost their goodness and then their knowledge, until finally only the coming of the Lord Himself into the world could save them. When Peter said to the Lord, "Thou art the Christ," the Lord said, "On this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The Lord came into the world as divine truth, and this was the stone which grew into a great mountain.

Basic Correspondences

iron = natural truth

clay = natural good turned to evil by being attributed to self

the feet = our daily conduct

Senior

The Seniors should be impressed with the depths of meaning which are to be found in the story of this dream image and with the variety of applications which it has. But the most important lesson for them is the danger of thinking themselves better and wiser than others and so letting the love of dominion creep into their hearts.

You may recall that in the divided kingdom Israel represents the mind and Judah the heart or will. Israel was taken captive by Assyria, which represents false reasoning, but Judah by Babylon, which represents "the love of dominion from the love of self." We meet this love of dominion in many forms in ourselves as well as in

others. We all like to think ourselves better than other people and to criticize others for not thinking and doing as we do. Of course we admit in a general way that we don't know everything and that we have faults, but we tend to excuse ourselves and not to excuse others. In any given case we are sure that the person who disagrees with us is wrong, and we are tempted to look for means of discrediting him and in the process to become careless of the truth and quite uncharitable. It is this kind of progressive deterioration of character as a result of the love of dominion which Nebuchadnezzar's image represents in its application to the individual life. We know that gold represents love to the Lord, silver spiritual truth or faith, brass natural goodness, and iron natural truth. Clay is another symbol of natural good, but in a bad sense it is this good turned to evil through being attributed to self. The head is the symbol of wisdom and the feet represent the outward conduct. So the image pictures the fact that even someone who starts with the intention of serving the Lord and a great deal of knowledge of spiritual things may—if he begins to think of his goodness and wisdom as his own and so sets himself above others—reach the point where his conduct toward others is wholly lacking in charity and directed by falsity rather than truth. Then if he is suddenly confronted by divine truth—as, for example, the truth that our conduct must be the expression of unselfish love for the Lord and the neighbor—the whole picture of himself which he has built up in his mind collapses and is blown away.

There are other applications of the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. In the letter Daniel gave Nebuchadnezzar its historical application. As we learn from chapters 3 and 4, Nebuchadnezzar himself, although he acknowledged Daniel's God with his lips, actually embodied the spirit represented by Babylon, and the kingdom he had built up passed to another nation not long after his death. The Lord is not only the creator and sustainer of the universe but is always in control of history. The rise and fall of nations is according to their service to the Lord or to self. This is something we should always keep in mind in forming our opinions in regard to

the policies and conduct of our own nation. For, as we read in Isaiah 60:12, "The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish." Even in this outmost interpretation of the image you notice that the final kingdom which is to stand forever is to be one which God shall set up.

Swedenborg interprets the image as applying to the church pictured by Babylon, which begins in genuine worship of the Lord but allows itself to come more and more into the love of rule until it has falsified all its truth by assuming the Lord's powers for itself. Swedenborg also in many places interprets the image as picturing the whole history of the Lord's church in the world. In this sense the head of gold is the Most Ancient Church, the breast and arms of silver the Ancient Church, the belly and thighs of brass the Hebrew Church through the time of the patriarchs, the legs of iron the Israelitish Church established among the sons of Jacob, and the feet of iron and clay this church in its last state when the Lord came into the world. The stone cut out without hands is divine truth in the person of the Lord Himself. In connection with this interpretation, we remember that mythology tells of the golden, silver, bronze, and iron ages.

There are many interesting stories in the book of Daniel as well as some wonderful prophecies concerning the Lord's Advent and even concerning His Second Coming. Daniel, the fourth of the Major Prophets, is the only prophet who became rich and powerful in the world, and he retained his prosperity and power throughout his long life, which extended into the reign of Cyrus, under whom the Jews were allowed to return to the Holy Land. But we see from the very first chapter of the book that Daniel's success was founded on his humility and obedience to the Lord. His story has striking similarities to that of Joseph, and it also gives us a good example of the truth of the ninety-first Psalm, which we have studied. Nothing could hurt Daniel because he trusted in the Lord.

There is another lesson which we should draw from our chapter. Because Daniel from the start disclaimed any credit for his wisdom and said that it was the Lord who was giving Nebuchadnezzar his

answer—just as Joseph had told Pharaoh so long before—Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the God of Daniel as the greatest of all gods, even though he also honored and rewarded Daniel himself. We do not lead people to the Lord by trying to impress them with our own goodness and wisdom. If you look back over history and look about you in the world, you will find that the men and women who are regarded as truly great are not the self-confident ones but those who recognize their own weakness and look to the Lord for guidance and strength.

Adult

Although the meaning of Babylon and the application of the lesson to Babylon should be brought to the attention of the Adults, the meaning developed in the quotation from AE 411⁴ should probably be given the greater part of the class time. Call attention to the fact that Babylon first appears in the Scriptures in the form of Babel and that it is not finally disposed of until chapter 18 of Revelation. It is our arch-enemy from the cradle to the grave.

The prophet Daniel, the fourth of the Major Prophets, was a member of the royal family of Judah and was carried to Babylon as a boy or very young man during the reign of Jehoiakim in Judah, when Babylon first invaded Judah and put it to tribute, thus before either of the two general deportations. We should read the first chapter of Daniel as a basis for understanding our lesson for today.

We remember that the ancient Jewish nation was only representative of a true church, and that it became more and more false to its original commission until it could no longer serve in that function. We remember, too, that Babylon represents “the love of dominion from the love of self,” the spiritual enemy which finally captivates the heart of the man who ceases to look to the Lord for guidance and to obey Him. So we may understand the meaning of Swedenborg’s summary interpretation of chapter 1 in *Prophets and Psalms*: “When the church among the Jewish nation had been destroyed, ‘Babylon’ appropriated to herself all things pertaining to it. She wished to know all things of the church, and to acquire

an understanding of them, and this was the beginning of 'Babylon'." Here Swedenborg is using Babylon to designate a particular type of church in the world, and this application of the meaning in *Prophets and Psalms* is continued through chapter 6. Then in chapter 7, which marks a transition, the application to the general history of the churches from the beginning is introduced, and the rest of the summary continues this larger application. In the light of this change it is interesting to read part of the Rev. William Hayden's account of the book of Daniel in *Our Heavenly Father's Book*:

The introduction to the book (Chap. i) is written in Hebrew, Daniel's native tongue. But when, as in the next chapter, he came to speak of and with the Chaldeans, who 'spake to the king in Syriac' (verse 4), he changed his language, and spake and wrote in their tongue, the Syriac or Chaldean, sometimes called also Aramaic. So from ii, 4 to end of Chap. vii., is in Chaldee, a language having the same characters and varying very little from the Hebrew. At the beginning of chapter viii., where Daniel resumes his own experiences as a prophet of the Lord, he returns to the Hebrew, and continues that to the end of the book.

The book thus is partly historical and partly prophetic. The prophecies may be divided into two parts; the first, those written in Chaldee, Chap. ii. to vii., giving an account of Belshazzar's feast, the den of lions, and the vision of the four beasts ascending out of the sea.

The second part, written in Hebrew, contains the vision of the ram and he goat, Chap. viii.; Daniel's prayer and the unfolding of the prophecy of the seventy years by the Angel Gabriel, Chap. ix.; the fourth prophetic vision, which Daniel had in the third year of Cyrus, fills the last three chapters. The wonderful appearance of the Lord to him, in Chap. x., should receive careful study.

The close analogy between Daniel's prophecies and the Book of Revelation, has been recognized by nearly all commentators. Not only the first coming of the Lord, but His second coming also is foretold; and events connected with the Lord's spiritual kingdom on earth are foreshadowed, from the beginning of Christianity to the very last ages, yet to come.

In the writings both the particular and the general application of the spiritual meaning of the image are given in some detail. The one application shows us in a striking way the danger of allowing

the love of dominion to gain power in our hearts. This love is often unrecognized at first. We recall that Hezekiah received the ambassadors of the king of Babylon as friends and showed them all his treasures, and that Isaiah was sent to him with the message: "Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord."

But there are many more passages in the writings which cite Nebuchadnezzar's image as picturing the whole history of the church from the beginning. Such a passage is the following from AE 411⁴: "'The head of the image' which was gold, signifies the Most Ancient Church, which was a celestial church, or a church in which the good of love to the Lord reigned; this good is signified in the Word by 'gold,' and also by 'the head'; 'the breast' and 'the arms' which were silver, signify the Ancient Church, which succeeded the Most Ancient, and this church was a spiritual church, or a church in which the good of charity towards the neighbor, and truth from that good, reigned; this truth and good are signified by 'silver,' and also by 'the breast' and 'the arms'; 'the belly and the thighs which were brass' signify the church which succeeded the ancient spiritual church and which may be called spiritual-natural; in this church the good of faith and the truth from that good reigned; this good is signified in the Word by 'brass,' and also by 'the belly' and 'the thighs'; but 'the legs and the feet, which were part iron and part clay,' signify the Israelitish and Jewish Church, which was an external church without any internal, and which therefore had no truth and good, but truth falsified which in itself is falsity, and good adulterated which in itself is evil; therefore it is said respecting it in this chapter: 'Whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of man; but they shall not cohere one with the other, even as iron doth not mingle with clay (verse 43).' 'Iron' signifies natural truth, and 'miry clay' natural good; 'the feet and legs' have a like meaning; but here 'clay' signifies good adulterated, and 'iron' such truth as there is in the external sense of the Word; for 'the

seed of man' means the Word where there are goods and truths, the adulterations and falsifications of which are described by 'iron mixed with clay, which do not cohere one with the other.' . . . 'The stone' that smote the image means Divine truth from the Lord; that 'it became a great rock and filled the whole earth' signifies that the Lord by Divine truth is to rule over heaven and the church."

The love of dominion is in all of us by inheritance. Babylon appears in the Word first as the Tower of Babel, the consummation of the Ancient Church. We need to recognize this evil in ourselves whenever and in whatever guise it crops up, and to fight it as the most subtle and deadly enemy of our spiritual life.

That it can be successfully resisted we learn from the story of Daniel. The character of Daniel stands out in sharp contrast to the state pictured by Babylon. Although he was one of those youths selected for his ability and education, he never took credit to himself for his wisdom. In the face of one danger after another he remained boldly faithful to the principles of his religion. In every emergency he looked to the Lord for guidance. He was true to his friends and also never bitter or resentful toward those who sought to injure him. And success and power had no bad effect on him. He retained both to the end of his life under several rulers and national sovereignties. Daniel, like Joseph, shows how divine power can express itself through the life of a person who is consistently humble before the Lord and obedient to His precepts. Daniel and Joseph are both examples of the man to whom, as we saw in our lesson on Psalm 91, the promises of protection by the Lord and the angels are addressed.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 1029⁵: "From the interpretation of this dream by Daniel, it is clear that it describes the state of the church that becomes Babylon, from its beginning to its end. . . . The successive states of this church even to the last are depicted by the head, breast, arms, belly, thighs, legs, and feet of the statue; likewise by the gold, silver, brass, iron and clay, of which

the statue consisted from top to bottom. All this makes clear that this church in its beginning was full of wisdom from the good of love to the Lord. For its 'head,' which is the highest part, signifies wisdom, and 'gold' signifies the good of love to the Lord. That the toes of its feet were 'part of iron and part of clay' signifies that the last state of that church would be without any good of love and without any wisdom. . . . 'The seed of man' signifies the Divine truth, thus the truth of the Word; and by this no coherence is effected, because at the end of the church it is falsified by application to the worship of men."

Arcana Coelestia, n. 9406⁷: "That 'a stone out of the rock broke in pieces the iron, the brass, the silver, and the gold' signifies that the church perishes in respect to the reception of truth from the Word, when falsity and evil are confirmed by the sense of the letter of the Word, as is the case when the church is in its last state, when it is no longer in any heavenly love, but only in worldly and bodily love. Such was the Word in respect to its reception among the Jewish nation when the Lord came into the world; and such is the Word with many at this day, insomuch that it is not even known that there is anything internal in the Word; and if it were said that there is, and its nature were to be told, it would not be received; when yet in the most ancient times, which were signified by 'gold,' nothing else was seen in the sense of the letter of the Word than what is heavenly, almost abstractedly from the letter."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. Where did Daniel prophesy? *Babylon*
- P. Why could the Lord always protect and enlighten Daniel? *his faith*
- J. Who was the king of Babylon at this time? *Nebuchadnezzar*
- P. What did he ask of his wise men? *recall and interpret his dream*
- P. How did Daniel learn the answer? *through prayer*
- J. What was Nebuchadnezzar's dream? *great image*
- P. What was the head of the image made of? *gold*
- J. What other metals formed other parts? *silver, bronze, iron*
- J. Of what were its feet? *iron and clay*
- P. How was it destroyed? *great stone*
- P. What became of the stone which destroyed it? *became a mountain*
- J. What did Nebuchadnezzar say about Daniel's God? "*a God of gods*"
- J. How did he reward Daniel? *ruler of province*
- I. What do the four metals in the image correspond to? *gold, love to God; silver, faith; bronze, natural goodness; iron, natural truth*
- I. What do the feet correspond to? *outer life*
- S. What does the whole vision picture? *the spiritual decline of one who allows love of dominion to develop in his life*

THE FIERY FURNACE

Daniel 3

The teacher should study the sections in the various graded notes on the decline of Israel and Judah and the captivities. This is the background against which today's lesson must be taught because of Daniel's origin and his position in Babylon. It is also important that all the children above the Primaries should know at least the simple facts concerning the captivities. A few minutes should be spent in reviewing the names and periods of the four great prophets so as to place Daniel among them, but most of the lesson time should be occupied with the story for the day.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord is close to us in times of trouble and temptation.

Notes for Parents

The book of Daniel is perhaps the best known of all the books of the Prophets. This is because it contains several striking stories which can be told to little children. One of these is the subject of our lesson today.

Because of the presence of the temple in Jerusalem and because some of the kings there were faithful to the Lord, the kingdom of Judah was able to stand longer than the kingdom of Israel. But in spite of their good kings and in spite of the warnings of the great prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, the people persisted in worshiping idols, and finally Judah was conquered by Babylon. If we persist in thinking that the good things of the world and the learning and theories of men are more important than finding out and doing what the Lord tells us is right, the time comes when selfishness takes complete possession of our hearts.

Daniel and the three young men of our story today were among a small group of youths of royal blood, specially chosen for their

mental ability, who were taken away before the destruction of Jerusalem to be educated in Babylon in the king's court, and they were well treated. These four remained faithful to the worship and practices in which they had been brought up at home, and so the Lord was with them and protected and prospered them. He gave Daniel the power of prophecy and the ability to interpret dreams so that Daniel, like Joseph long before, rose to be one of the chief rulers of the land; and at his suggestion his three friends were also put in charge of provinces.

In the divided kingdom, Israel pictures our mind and Judah our heart. Israel fell first because it was started in idolatry. When once we begin to listen to worldly reasoning—as Psalm 1 points out—we get further and further from an understanding of the truth. Our hearts may still cherish good intentions, but without the truth to guide and protect us, selfishness eventually prevails. This selfishness, especially the love of having our own way, is Babylon; and Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, stands for the ruling principle of the selfish heart, the principle of self-praise and belief in our own wisdom.

Nebuchadnezzar set up a great golden image, and ordered everyone in the land to worship it on pain of being cast into a burning fiery furnace. In our story the fiery furnace into which Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were cast for refusing to worship the image pictures the temptations to which we are subjected when we are steadfast in looking to the Lord for guidance instead of doing as “everybody else” does. But we need not be afraid of these temptations, for the Lord is present with us. In His life on earth He met and overcame every temptation which can possibly come to any of us; and if we are faithful, He will always give us strength to overcome, just as He brought Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego unharmed through the fire.

Primary

This is an easy story to tell to children, who can be fired with admiration for

the faithful three and with wonder at their deliverance. It is a good thing for the Primary children to learn the name of Daniel and to try to learn the names of his three friends so that the names will at least be familiar to them. They will be interested in the incident of their refusing the king's rich food (Daniel 1). The important lesson is the necessity of standing up for what you know to be right no matter how strongly you may be tempted.

When you are playing with other children and they all begin to do something you know you have been told not to do, it is very hard, isn't it? You don't like to be different from all the rest. But if you are brave enough to do what is right no matter what the others are doing, things go better for you afterward.

Long ago there were four young men in the king's family in Judah who were carried far away to Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, took possession of Judah. They were well treated, for king Nebuchadnezzar wanted them as very special helpers for himself. But the people of Babylon did not worship the true God whom the four young men had been taught to worship, and did many things which they knew to be wrong. They made up their minds they would not do these things.

One of these young men was Daniel, who afterward became a prophet of the Lord and wrote one of the books in our Bible. In his book he tells about some of the things which happened to them. At the very start they refused to eat some of the food the king gave them because it was food which their religious laws forbade them to eat. They asked the man in charge to give them only vegetables to eat and water to drink. He was afraid they would not be as healthy as the others and that the king would blame him, but he agreed to try it. Because they were doing right, the Lord saw to it that their food agreed with them, and they became stronger and handsomer than all the others.

Then king Nebuchadnezzar set up a great golden image and told everyone to worship it.

What did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego tell the king?

What did the king have his servants do with them?

Were they burned?

Whom did Nebuchadnezzar see in the fiery furnace with them?

What happened to the men who cast them into the furnace?
Then the king commanded that no one should ever speak a word against the
God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
And he promoted all three of them.

You see when we mean to be good and try to do right, the Lord is always very close to us to help us resist temptation. He keeps us safe, just as He kept Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego safe in the midst of the fiery furnace. And when we have the courage to do right, we help other people to do right, too.

Junior

With this class the historical background should be carefully covered, and they should be told something of Daniel's later history. They know that people who are upright and firm come to be respected, and they need to be shown that this respect is not something that can be won in a moment or sometime after you grow up, but must be built up by a lifetime habit of acting from principle instead of from impulse.

Judah had several good kings but also many bad ones. Israel, you remember, had only bad kings. Israel became worse and worse, and the Lord could not save it because its people would not obey Him. Finally, the armies of Assyria conquered Israel and carried all its people away to the east, sending in foreigners to take their place. The Samaritans of the Lord's time were descendants of these strangers. The ten tribes who composed the kingdom of Israel never came back to the Holy Land. They are sometimes called "the lost tribes," and there have been many theories as to just what became of their descendants.

The king of Assyria also tried to capture Jerusalem and Judah, but the king on the throne of Judah at that time was one of its best kings, Hezekiah, and so the Lord saved Judah. Later, however, the kings of Judah forsook the Lord again, and the armies of Babylon were allowed to conquer Judah and destroy Jerusalem and carry off all the important people to Babylon. But it was promised that after seventy years they should be allowed to return.

When the king of Babylon won his first victory in Judah, he

carried off a selected group of people (read II Kings 24:11-16) among whom were four young men (read Daniel 1:1-7) of the royal household who were of special ability.

What were their Hebrew names?

What were they called in Babylon?

Daniel's Chaldean name never became familiar, because he was chosen by the Lord to be one of the Prophets, and in the Word he is always called Daniel, one of the books of the Word bearing his name. The other three are best known by their Chaldean names. All four, although they were specially educated to serve the king of Babylon, remained faithful to the Lord. They proved this first by refusing to eat the king's rich food while they were being trained. They asked instead to be given only "pulse" to eat and water to drink. *Pulse* is an old word for green vegetables and perhaps cereals. They lived on this all the time they were being educated, and it is reported that they thrived on it better than all the other young men did on the king's food.

The Lord gave Daniel power to interpret dreams—the same power He had given Joseph so long before—and Daniel was able to interpret a strange dream for king Nebuchadnezzar which none of his own wise men could interpret. So Nebuchadnezzar made Daniel ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief of the governors, and at Daniel's request he gave high positions also to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

But Nebuchadnezzar was a very proud man, who enjoyed making other people do his bidding. In our chapter for today we see the trouble to which this led.

What did Nebuchadnezzar set up?

What command did he give?

What was to be the punishment of anyone who disobeyed?

What did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego do?

What did Nebuchadnezzar command in his rage?

What happened to his own officers as a result?

Afterward, what did Nebuchadnezzar see in the furnace?

You see, the Lord was with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to

save them just as they had said He would be. Whenever we stand up for the right and do right, the Lord is with us and takes care of us. And not only this, but we also influence others to recognize and respect the Lord. This was shown in the effect on Nebuchadnezzar of the steadfastness of the three young men.

What new command did Nebuchadnezzar give?

What did he do for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

Intermediate

The tendency to "follow the crowd" is particularly strong at this age; so the lesson is an important one. A discussion of the common temptations of school life and how they can be met will be helpful. Call attention to the fact that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not make a parade of their goodness. They merely took it for granted that they would do what they knew to be right regardless of the consequences. This habit was built up in them from the beginning of their captivity, and while it set them apart from their companions, in the end it made them great men.

Assyria was not permitted to conquer Judah. Assyria as an enemy represents false reasoning, and while false reasoning can wholly take possession of the understanding, it cannot of itself destroy good motives in the heart. But there is an enemy which can corrupt the heart. One of the later kings of Judah, Hezekiah, although he was one of the most thoroughgoing reformers of them all, admitted to his confidence the envoys of the king of Babylon who came pretending to be his friends, and showed them all his treasures. After that it was not long before Babylon conquered Judah and gradually carried away its treasures and its leaders, finally destroying Jerusalem and the temple itself. Babylon pictures "the love of dominion from the love of self"—in simple terms, the love of getting our own way—and this is the enemy which can creep into our hearts and gradually rob us of all our good affections.

Daniel, the last of the Major Prophets, was one of the young men of the royal household carried away to Babylon with the first group, before the great captivity. These young men were selected to be trained in Babylon as advisers to the king, and they were

well treated. Doubtless most of them fell readily into the ways and worship of Babylon. But four of them, Daniel, Hanniah, Mishael, and Azariah—to whom were given the Chaldean names of Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—determined to remain faithful to Jehovah and to continue the customs in which they had been brought up in Judah. They first refused to eat the king's rich food. We can easily see that this pictures refusing to take into our hearts and minds desires and thoughts which support the habit of living for the pleasures and rewards of the world. Whenever we find ourselves trying to get our own way without thinking whether it is really right and just and then hunting for "good" reasons why we should have our own way, we are eating the food and drinking the wine of the king of Babylon.

This temptation to put ourselves first is further defined in the story of our chapter for today, which concerns worship. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, pictures the ruling principle of self-love, which is self-intelligence, the idea that "what I think is so must be so." This idea tries to bend all the truths of the Word and the services of the church to the glorification of self. So Nebuchadnezzar set up a golden image and commanded the people to worship it. The punishment for disobedience was that one would be cast into a "burning fiery furnace." Worldly people imagine that the good life is a hard and painful one, full of suffering from the burning of unsatisfied desires. But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship the image. They felt sure that the Lord would not let them be tormented, but they said that even if they should suffer in the furnace, they would still be faithful. And their faith was justified. The Lord appeared in the furnace with them and they were unhurt. The Lord, when He was in the world, underwent all the temptations which men can ever feel, and He is closely present with us in temptation to give us power to overcome. Not only were the three young men unharmed by the fire, but Nebuchadnezzar was convinced of the power of their God and issued an edict that no one in his kingdom should ever speak a word against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Daniel later in a similar incident was saved by the Lord from lions. All four young men were raised to positions of power in Babylon. Daniel, because the Lord gave to Him, as He had to Joseph, the ability to interpret dreams, was elevated to a position next to the king. The other three were given charge over provinces. And Nebuchadnezzar, through the series of experiences he had with these four young men, was finally brought to acknowledge Jehovah as the most high God. Nebuchadnezzar's son, Belshazzar, also had a demonstration of Daniel's power, and his successor Darius the Mede, although he overthrew Belshazzar, retained Daniel as ruler under him of the whole land.¹ And it is recorded that Daniel continued to prosper in the reign of Cyrus the Persian, the ruler who permitted the people of Judah to return to their own land. So the prophet Daniel spans the whole period of the captivity of Judah.

Basic Correspondences

Assyria = the rational plane of the mind

Babylon = the love of dominion from the love
of self

Nebuchadnezzar = self-intelligence, the ruling principle
of self-love

Senior

Something should be done in this class with the subject of the Lord's temptations and victories and the reality of His presence with us in temptation. Young people may not talk much about the Lord, but if he is presented to them in an inspiring way in home and Sunday school, they do not forget Him in their thinking. He does in a very real sense walk with them by the way and save them from many dangers.

The prophet Daniel is one of the most striking figures in the Word. His fidelity and courage in the face of the temptations of wealth and power have always stood as an example, and—unlike many of the Bible characters—he seems to have no weaknesses to explain away. The promising young Hebrew, taken captive in his early youth by the king of Babylon with a view to making his

talents useful to the king, is a clear symbol of our spiritual nature so early subjected to the selfish and worldly demands of our natural heredity.

Daniel and his three companions refused to eat the rich food or drink the wine of the king of Babylon. It is possible for us, even as very young people, to reject selfish feelings and thoughts and to substitute for them humility before the Lord and study of the truths of the Word. And the result is always immediate. We gain from day to day in strength and beauty of character, as Daniel and his companions "appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the King's meat." Chapter 1 of Daniel tells this story. And just as Daniel and his three companions gained the king's favor, so we also gain unexpected recognition and respect from the selfish "leaders" around us.

But this external prosperity and admiration brings with it a new temptation to rely on self and forget God. The changing of the names of the four young men by Nebuchadnezzar suggests this. In each case the original Hebrew name contains the syllable *el* or *ah* which are syllables taken from the name of the Lord—Elohim or Jehovah. The new names not only leave out these syllables but contain either the name of an idol or the suggestion of some quality which exalts self. Babylon throughout the Scriptures is the symbol of the "love of dominion from the love of self." Reduced to the simplest language this means the desire to have our own way in everything. The king who rules this selfish kingdom is the principle of self-intelligence: "I know; if you don't agree with me, you must be a fool." The golden image which Nebuchadnezzar set up is a symbol of self gilded over and made into a god to be worshiped. Nebuchadnezzar says in effect: "If you don't serve yourself first, your natural desires will burn you up." The selfish person sees no possible happiness in self-control. And when we yield to this temptation to set up self as an idol, the very fate prophesied for the God-fearing overtakes us instead: our natural passions increase and do burn us up, as the sevenfold heat of the furnace destroyed the men who threw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the fire.

But those three were not harmed, "nor was a hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them." They relied on the Lord, and the Lord was with them in the furnace of temptation: so the fire could not hurt or change them. The Lord took on our finite human nature for the very purpose of meeting and overcoming all the temptations which men can ever possibly experience. If we trust in Him and obey Him, He walks with us wherever we go and gives us power to resist temptation—to go through "fire" unharmed.

When they were brought before the king, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego seemed to stand alone. All the might of the kingdom was against them. So we may sometimes seem to be alone and helpless in the midst of our worldly environment. But we have only to stand firm. It is worldliness which is really powerless, powerless to bring happiness or peace to anyone, and powerless to disturb the good person. Throughout the history of the world it has been by means of the few people who stood firmly for the right that the course of events has eventually been decided. It helps us sometimes if we realize that to "follow the crowd" is weakness and not courage. The house built on the rock is the one which stands.

Adult

The meaning of Babylon and of Nebuchadnezzar and the image in their application to modern religious thought is an important lesson for this class. Attention should be called to II Kings 20:12-17, in which is described the insidious beginning of the captivity to Babylon. Psalm 1:1-2 may also be recalled in connection with the complete faithfulness of the three young men in the story.

We come now to the last chapters of the long history which we have been following through the Old Testament. Most of the nation—Israel—has been conquered and carried away into the eastern countries by Assyria, never to return. The surviving division—Judah—has been overcome by Babylon, and although we know that a part of this group is destined to return and rebuild Jerusalem

and the temple, it will be merely a return by permission of a foreign master.

In the decline of Judah we see the gradual degeneration of the will to serve the Lord, the desire to "be good," which comes about through admitting other motives into our hearts—the worship of idols. Although worldly reasoning cannot actually destroy this good desire—Assyria (symbolizing worldly reasoning) was not permitted to conquer Judah—still the degeneration of the good will is much more rapid after the understanding is taken captive by worldly reasoning. Spiritual truth and the ability to reason from spiritual grounds are an essential bulwark of the good heart. Without them we do not recognize evil for what it is, as Asa invited the aid of Syria and paid for it with the treasures of the temple, and as Hezekiah later treated the envoys of Babylon as friends and showed them all his treasures. Often self-love enters into our hearts without our recognizing it. This is particularly true in our worship. Most of us, when we join the church, do so because we feel the desire to serve the Lord; but how easy it is, once we become used to our new position, to think of ourselves as better than those who have not taken the same step, to take our own goodness as a matter of course, making no effort to learn more of the teachings of the church than we already know, going through the forms of worship mechanically, and thinking of our church membership not as an opportunity to serve but as a fact which puts the church organization under a particular obligation to serve us! If we do not recognize and reject this evil in ourselves, we are likely to come into a state where we try to run everything in the church and care more about having our own way than we do about the service of the Lord or the welfare of the church. Whenever this happens, "Judah" has been carried away captive to "Babylon." In AE 1010 we read: "The love of honor, of rule, and of supereminence is the last state of the church . . . for that love more than all other loves extinguishes the light of heaven and induces the darkness of hell."

Daniel was a prophet of the captivity. He belonged to the royal family of Judah and was carried away into Babylon among the

earliest of the captives. He was one of several young men—among them the three of our chapter for today—chosen for their mental ability to be brought up in the court of Nebuchadnezzar and trained in all the learning of the Chaldeans. He was noted for his complete faithfulness to the worship of Jehovah, and because of it he was gifted by the Lord with great wisdom and with the power to interpret dreams. He remained in royal favor under Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, and Cyrus, and is thought to have lived to be about ninety years old. The book of Daniel was written partly in Hebrew and partly in Chaldee or Aramaic, a closely allied language, the section from chapter 2, verse 4 through chapter 7 being in Aramaic. There is more narrative in the book of Daniel than in most of the Prophets, the stories of Nebuchadnezzar's image, of the fiery furnace, of the lions' den, and of Belshazzar's feast being incorporated in many books of Bible stories for children. Yet it also contains visions as strange as those in Ezekiel and Revelation, and visions of the future of the church under the form of the fate of Israel and the nations. The book was not included by the ancient Hebrews among the Prophets, but the Lord Himself restored it to its proper place by speaking of "Daniel the prophet" (Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14).

The personal history of Daniel and his companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, illustrates a very important lesson—the reward of faithfulness and obedience to the Lord in the face of apparently overwhelming difficulties. First they refused to defile themselves with the king's rich food. The food and wine of the king of Babylon picture the evils and falsities which nourish our self-esteem, such ideas as "If you don't put yourself forward, no one else will," and "God helps those who help themselves," in its commonly accepted meaning. The four young men instead ate only "pulse" and drank only water, which picture the simple principles derived from goodness of heart and the truths of the Word. As a result, instead of suffering they became "fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat." It is a fact that those who have the courage to live according

to the teachings of the Lord, putting the Lord and the neighbor before self steadily in their daily life attain a standing and reputation in their communities which no self-seeking person can possibly attain. If we today faithfully obey the Lord's teachings and have the courage to put them to the test, we shall find that His protection and enlightenment are with us throughout our lives.

As Babylon represents the "love of dominion from the love of self," its king represents the principle of self-intelligence which perverts all truth to the service of self. Swedenborg says that Nebuchadnezzar represents "the profanation of truth and its consequent destruction." This is typified in his setting up the golden image to be worshiped. When we begin to exalt human intelligence above revelation, we set up our own judgment as a golden god to be worshiped, and all truth must be bent to agree with the theories which our judgment has adopted.

There is something very striking in the repetitions in our chapter for today. The musical instruments, the various orders of rank of the kingdom, the burning fiery furnace, and even the repetition of the three Chaldean names, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, have a sort of hypnotic influence which makes one think of the reiteration of some current humanistic slogans. The words of the three young men in verses 16 to 18 stand out in sharp contrast. They say in effect: "What is all this mummery to us? We serve the Lord." So with us, if we accept the Word as divine revelation and recognize its simple commands as binding, its great plain affirmations cut through the maze of theory and rationalizing and elaborate terminology which some modern Bible scholars and theologians have woven to the enslavement of the unthinking. Nebuchadnezzar says to us today: "I have set up a god for you, the human intelligence glossed over with the gold of 'service to humanity.' Whenever you feel the impulse to worship—the sound of the musical instruments—recognize human achievement as your god. This is the only thing really praiseworthy. It shows you how to be comfortable, how to get what you want. If you will not march with the crowd, you will have no satisfaction for your natural

desires. They will burn you up." And to this Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answer: "There is none good but one, that is, God."

And when they were cast into the furnace, we read: "Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and said unto his counselors, Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." Temptations not only have no power to harm the faithful, but the Lord is always close to us in times of temptation. In His life on earth He met and overcame all possible temptations, and it is His power which overcomes in and for us.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 1010: "The love of honor, or rule, and of supereminence is the last state of the church, when falsities are about to fight against truths, because that love is about to rule in the church in its last times, and when that love rules, falsity from evil rules also, and this overcomes truth; for that love more than all other loves extinguishes the light of heaven and induces the darkness of hell . . . That man from that love is in thick darkness as to all things of heaven and the church, consequently in mere falsities, does not appear to the man who is in it, because according to the brilliancy of natural light in them spiritual light is extinguished; but that brilliancy is from a delusive light, for it is a light kindled from a love of glory, thus from the love of self-intelligence; and when that intelligence is seen in heaven it is insanity and folly; therefore when that love rules in the church it is all over with it, for no one has any longer any understanding of truth or any will of good. . . . It is otherwise when uses are made the end, and man does not attribute glory and honor to his own person, but to the uses themselves according to their excellence. Then honor, rule, and supereminence are the means, and are esteemed only to the extent that they serve uses as means . . . Moreover, it has been shown me to the life that that love has devastated the church and adulterated all its goods and truths, not only in the kingdoms of Babylon but in all other kingdoms. For almost everyone at this day when he comes into the spiritual world carries with him out of the natural world the desire to be honored, to rule, and to be supereminent; and there are very few who love uses for the sake of uses, but it is their will that uses should serve, and that honor, which

is not a use, should govern; and when that rules which when separated from use is nothing, there can be no lot or inheritance granted them in the heavens where uses alone rule, since the kingdom of the Lord is a kingdom of uses; and when these rule the Lord rules, since uses are goods, and all good is from the Lord."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. What became of the people of Judah? *taken to Babylon*
- P. What young prince among the captives wrote a book of the Bible? *Daniel*
- J. What were the names of his three companions? *Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego*
- J. Why did these four young men attract special notice? *refused rich food*
- J. Did their faithfulness to the Lord do them harm? *no*
- J. Who was king of Babylon at the time of our story? *Nebuchadnezzar*
- P. What did Nebuchadnezzar make? *gold image*
- P. What command did he give? *when you hear the music, bow down*
- P. What did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego do? *refused*
- P. What did Nebuchadnezzar do to them? *threw them in a furnace*
- P. Were they burned? *no*
- P. Who appeared in the fiery furnace with them? *the Lord*
- J. What happened to the men who had cast them into the furnace? *killed*
- J. What order did Nebuchadnezzar afterward give? *no one speak against the Lord*
- I. What does Babylon represent? *love of having one's own way*
- S. What does Nebuchadnezzar represent? *self-praise and pride in our own wisdom*

BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST

Daniel 5

In the original four-year series, this lesson was a general lesson on the Major Prophets with a considerable amount of information on the Prophets in general, but also including detailed study of Daniel 5. Thus we have placed it here in this edition. —*Ed.*

Doctrinal Points

The Lord inspired all the Prophets.

The book of Daniel is part of the inspired Word.

Confidence in self is the opposite of faith in the Lord.

Humility is essential to goodness.

Notes for Parents

The whole Word is really prophecy, because its instruction is meant for people of all time, and even what seems to be merely the history of the ancient Jews tells us things about our own lives, our weaknesses and temptations and how to meet them, and about the Lord as the only source of security and happiness today as always. So the whole Word is our prophet.

But there are also many individuals in the Bible story who are spoken of as prophets. They were chosen and prepared to speak for the Lord to the people. Some of them are not even called by name. Some of those who are named—like Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha—did not give their names to books in the Bible. But at the end of the Old Testament there are sixteen* books which we call “the Prophets.” The first four of these are called the Major Prophets because their books are long as compared with the other twelve.

The Major Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Isaiah lived in the time of king Hezekiah of Judah. Jeremiah, as we

*A seventeenth book, Lamentations, is included in this group. —*Ed.*

have learned, was a prophet in Judah at the time Babylon conquered it. Ezekiel and Daniel were also from Judah. Ezekiel was a priest and Daniel one of the royal family. But they were both taken away to Babylon with the captives, and their prophecies were given and written there.

Daniel's story is quite a bit like Joseph's, for in his captivity he was faithful to the Lord and the Lord protected him and gave him power to interpret dreams, which brought him to the attention of king Nebuchadnezzar and led to his being made a ruler in the kingdom.

The story of Babylon is the story of how pride and the desire to be greatest and to rule over others inevitably leads to one's own destruction. "Pride goeth before destruction" is one of the proverbs of Solomon which is very true. Chapter 5 of Daniel tells of the defeat of Babylon, which was the result of the final profaning of the holy vessels of the temple of Jerusalem by Belshazzar, the son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar.

When we watch someone going ahead stubbornly in a course which we are sure will end in disaster, we may say, "Can't he read the writing on the wall?" The strange words which Daniel interpreted are from the Chaldean language, which was spoken in Babylon, and which was much like the Hebrew. Belshazzar was frightened by the sudden appearance of the hand which wrote on the wall, but he did not think of repenting. Something from the Word about judgment, heard suddenly, may startle a selfish man, but it does not change him. Our characters are built up day by day by our free choices, and they cannot be changed in a moment.

Primary

With this class try to see that the children know what a prophet is and why the prophets were sent; remind them who the Major Prophets were and why they were called "Major." Then spend the rest of the lesson time on the story. Try to teach the children the names of the four Major Prophets.

Do you remember what a prophet is? It is a person who speaks

for the Lord. You have heard about some of the Lord's prophets: Samuel, Nathan, Elijah and Elisha, and Jeremiah. Whenever the people were doing wrong, the Lord sent a prophet to rebuke and warn them, because the Lord loves us all and is always trying to keep us from doing what will hurt us, and to show us the way to be really happy.

Some of the prophets, like Nathan and Elijah and Elisah, only spoke the Lord's words, but others were commanded by the Lord not only to speak them but to write them down, because their messages were meant for everyone—even for us today.

At the end of the Old Testament you will find four long books by prophets followed by twelve short ones.

There is another short one, which is called *Lamentations*, but this really belongs to the book of Jeremiah.

The four prophets through whom the four long books were written are called the "Major" Prophets.

The prophets through whom the twelve short books were written are called the "Minor" Prophets.

This is just because of the difference in length of the books.

See if you can learn the names of the four Major Prophets.

Isaiah lived in the day of king Hezekiah of Judah.

When did Jeremiah live?

Ezekiel and Daniel were both among the people carried off by the king of Babylon, and they prophesied in captivity in Babylon.

But Daniel became a very great man in the land of Babylon.

This was because he always obeyed the Lord and the Lord could protect and enlighten him.

Who was king of Babylon at the time of our lesson?

What did he do that was wrong?

What happened which frightened him?

To whom did he first go to find out what the writing meant?

Why was Daniel called in?

What did he say the writing meant?

His prophecy came true immediately.

Do you know why the Lord does not send prophets to us today? It is because He has given us the Word, in which we can read all the things He wants us to know.

Junior

The Juniors have been told something about the difference between the Jewish canon of Scripture and the New Church canon, and this knowledge can here be carried a step further. They should also remember something about both Isaiah and Jeremiah. They may even have some recollection of Ezekiel's vision. Always get as much as you can from their own memories. The character of Daniel will be stressed more in our next lesson; so Belshazzar's sin and the interpretation of the writing should be the main lesson this time.

What is a prophet?

Why did the Lord send prophets?

What do we have to speak to us for the Lord?

We have learned that the part of the Jewish Bible called "The Prophets" contains the "Former Prophets," the books from Joshua through II Kings (except Ruth), and the "Latter Prophets," the books from Isaiah through Malachi (except Lamentations, which really belongs with the book of Jeremiah). We usually think of the first group as historical books, and of the second group as "The Prophets." These in common thought are again divided into the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets. This is only because the first four are "full-length" books, whereas the last twelve are very short books. "Books" in Old Testament times were really parchment scrolls. Each of the four Major Prophets required a whole scroll, while the twelve Minor Prophets were all written on the same single scroll.

Who were the four Major Prophets?

When did Isaiah live?

When did Jeremiah live?

Where did Jeremiah die?

Jeremiah wrote the Lamentations after he was carried away to Egypt. The other two Major Prophets—Ezekiel and Daniel—also wrote in captivity, but Ezekiel had been a priest, and perhaps a prophet, before he was carried away to Babylon, and this is probably one reason why his book was included among the books of the prophets. Another reason may be that Ezekiel was more than once carried "in the spirit" back to Jerusalem to receive his visions. It was felt that it was very doubtful that a prophet could be inspired

outside of the Holy Land. This is why Lamentations and also the book of Daniel are not in the Hebrew "canon" of Scripture. A "canon" is an ecclesiastical ruling or decision.

Daniel prophesied in Babylon. He was one of the young men of the royal household of Judah who were among the first to be carried away when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah. Read Daniel 1:1-7 to learn the beginning of Daniel's history, and then read the next few verses of that chapter to see how Daniel became a prophet. We have had the story of Nebuchadnezzar's image, and you will remember that when all the wise men and astrologers of Babylon could not tell Nebuchadnezzar what he had dreamed and what his dream meant, Daniel came and told him, and so he made Daniel one of the rulers of his kingdom. Chapter 4 tells of another dream of Nebuchadnezzar which Daniel interpreted, and how his interpretation came true. This is the story to which Daniel refers in verses 18 to 21 of our chapter for today. The king in our story is the son of Nebuchadnezzar, and he has forgotten his father's experience and has forgotten Daniel as well.

Who is this king?

What wrong thing did he do?

What happened which frightened him?

Whom did he first call in to tell him what the writing meant?

Could the wise men of Babylon help him?

Who reminded him of Daniel?

What did he promise Daniel if he could interpret the writing?

What did Daniel say about this promise?

What were the words of the writing?

What did Daniel say they meant?

What happened to Belshazzar?

What happened to his kingdom?

So the Medes took over the kingdom immediately, just as Daniel had prophesied. Their next king after Darius was Cyrus the Persian (Daniel 6:28).

Perhaps you have noticed that when Daniel interprets the writing on the wall, he uses the word *Peres* instead of *Upharsin*; so you need to know that this is just a different form of the same word.

The *U* in *Upharsin* means "and" in the Chaldean and Hebrew languages, and putting this sound before a word often changes the sound of the first letter of the word; here it makes the difference in sound that there is between "p" and "ph." The changes in the last part of the word are also easily understood if one has studied the language. The Chaldean language, which the people of Babylon used, was almost the same as Hebrew.

Intermediate

Do more in this class with the Prophets as a whole. Make connection with previous lessons through Isaiah and Jeremiah and later through Nebuchadnezzar. More will be done in the next lesson with Daniel as an individual; so the major part of the lesson time may be given to a discussion of the story in our chapter and its meaning—the final result of the love of dominion.

We divide the books of the Prophets into the "Major" and the "Minor" Prophets solely on the basis of the length of the books, those of the twelve Minor Prophets being very short. There were many prophets besides those who gave their names to books in the Bible. We have heard of some of them in our lessons: Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha. There were many others. Samuel—who was himself a prophet—established schools for the training of young men to be suitable for prophets, and we hear of these groups several times in the Bible story, especially in the time of Elijah and Elisha. Read II Kings 2:5-7, 15-18. These young men studied the law of the Lord and forms of worship, and followed certain orderly and temperate ways of life which would make them such that the Lord, if he chose, could use them as instruments when He wanted to speak to the people. We read in the Word also of false prophets who deceived the people by pretending to speak for the Lord when He had not spoken to them. But through the true prophets the Lord spoke many things which were for the times only and therefore not recorded in the Word. Those prophecies which He commanded to be written were for all men of all times. So the whole Word is our prophet, for in it are all the messages which the

Lord wishes us to hear, and in His Second Coming the Lord has given us the means of understanding these messages as we come to need them. The books of the Prophets especially are mysteries to us without this help which the Lord has given the world through Emanuel Swedenborg.

There are four Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Isaiah, we remember, lived in the time of king Hezekiah of Judah, and Jeremiah in the last days of Judah. The book of Lamentations, which follows Jeremiah in our Bible, was given through Jeremiah after he was carried away into Egypt. Ezekiel and Daniel prophesied in captivity. Ezekiel was a priest as well as a prophet.

To know about Daniel we should read Daniel 1:1-7. He and his three special companions were evidently young men of royal blood in Judah and were distinguished from the rest not only by their intellectual ability but also by their absolute faithfulness to the teachings in which they had been brought up before they were carried off to Babylon. Because of their faithfulness they could be completely protected by the Lord, and Daniel was given the power of interpreting dreams and also prophetic power. This was recognized by the kings of Babylon and resulted in the advancement of all four young men to high position in the kingdom.

Our story for today is a striking one, and is one of the well-known parts of the Bible. You may sometimes hear people say of a person who is persisting stubbornly in an obviously wrong course, "Can't he see the writing on the wall?" Belshazzar was the son of Nebuchadnezzar. He had apparently reorganized his father's kingdom under new lords who were his own favorites, and Daniel had been forgotten. Nebuchadnezzar had been a proud king. You remember that Babylon represents the love of dominion. The story to which Daniel refers in verses 18 to 21 of our chapter for today is told in chapter 4. But Nebuchadnezzar was willing to learn from his experience, and after he was restored to sanity he humbled himself before the God of Daniel, who had told him through Daniel what was to happen to him.

Belshazzar was not the wise man his father had been. Nebuchad-

nezzar had carried away to Babylon all the golden and silver vessels of the temple (II Kings 24:13), but he had kept them with his treasures in the house of his own god. Now Belshazzar brought them out and profaned them by using them at his feast to add to his own importance and glory. The vessels of the temple represent knowledges of good and truth from the Word which contain the "wine" of spiritual truth and are given to enable us to worship and serve the Lord truly. When these knowledges are used selfishly—to "set us up" above others—we profane them. Swedenborg tells us a good deal about profanation, which is defined as knowing and acknowledging the truth and refusing to live according to it. We all do this to some extent, and there are different kinds and degrees of profanation. Belshazzar's act represents one of the most serious forms of profanation, which destroys spiritual life.

The handwriting on the wall presents a vivid picture in the letter. The sudden appearance of the "fingers of a hand" and the strange words stay in our memories. It represents the plain condemnation from the Word of such profanation as Belshazzar's. It frightened Belshazzar because of its supernatural character, and his fear led to the reappearance of Daniel. Belshazzar rewarded Daniel for his ability to interpret the writing. But once the writing was interpreted, there is no record that Belshazzar tried to undo what he had done. And the appeal to Daniel and the reward given him did not save Belshazzar or his kingdom. There is an important lesson in this. No one is saved by what he does in a state of fear, because when we are frightened, we are not acting freely. After the fear is past, we fall back into the state which we have developed in ourselves by our free daily choices of right or wrong. We are in the end what we make ourselves by our whole life, and we cannot be changed in a moment.

We may know that afterward the vessels of the temple were put back among the royal treasures because later, in the first year of the reign of Cyrus the Persian, when the captives were allowed to return to the Holy Land, Cyrus gave them back the vessels of the temple. You may read this story in the first chapter of the book of

Ezra, which is not one of the books with an inner sense but is very valuable for our knowledge of the return.

Basic Correspondences

vessels of the temple = knowledges from the Word which enable us to worship

wine = spiritual truth

the writing on the wall = judgment from the Word

Senior

Draw as much as possible upon the knowledge which the pupils themselves have of the general facts concerning the Major Prophets. It is good for the young people to find out how much or how little they know about the Bible. The chapter assigned is a valuable one for them, and the lesson can be easily brought out by contrasting Belshazzar with Nebuchadnezzar. The teacher should read all the pupils' notes from the Junior level up for an adequate background.

The four Major Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. We call them "Major" only because their books are longer than those of the twelve Minor Prophets which follow them in our Bible. All the prophets were equally inspired by the Lord, but some prophesied over longer periods than others. Not all the prophets were commanded to write down and preserve their prophecies, although in some cases—such as those of Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha—many of their words were recorded in the course of the story. Many of the prophets are not known to us at all by name. In fact, all of the Word—whether or not we know through whom it was given—is prophecy because it is for all men of all time, and so we may think of the whole Word as our prophet, who instructs us and blesses or warns or condemns us, according to our daily choices.

In the letter, the books of the Prophets are often obscure and in places apparently meaningless to us. Yet with the assistance of the writings of the Second Coming we can find in them much instruction and help, and Swedenborg tells us that we should read all of them regularly because even those passages which are beyond our

present experience bring us some light and help, for the angels who are with us as we read are understanding their spiritual meaning [see AC 6333].

We have some personal knowledge of Isaiah and Jeremiah from our study of the latter part of the history of Judah. Ezekiel and Daniel were also from Judah, but their prophecies were written in Babylon. Ezekiel was a priest, already a grown man when he was carried away, but Daniel was one of the young men of the royal family who were selected, at Nebuchadnezzar's command, and brought to Babylon sometime before the final captivity to be trained in the language and learning of the Chaldeans, the language of Babylon. Incidentally, this language was very much like the Hebrew. The words written on the wall in our story for today are Chaldean, and we might note that the word *Peres* which Daniel translates is just the basic word of which *Upharsin* is a grammatical form, the *U* merely meaning "and."

All the young princes of Judah received their instruction from the priests; so Daniel, even as a boy, was well versed in the religion of his own people, and he was one of those who chose to be faithful to it and who were not led away into idolatry after they went to Babylon. All the stories in the book of Daniel teach us this fact. His faithfulness to the Lord made it possible for the Lord to protect him and to give him the power to interpret dreams and to foretell the future.

We have had the story of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image. You will remember that because Daniel was able to tell the dream and to interpret it, Nebuchadnezzar not only made Daniel ruler over the province of Babylon and governor over all his wise men, but he also recognized Daniel's God as a "God of gods, and a Lord of kings." The story about Nebuchadnezzar to which Daniel refers in verses 18 to 21 of our chapter for today is found in chapter 4. You remember that Babylon represents the love of dominion. Nebuchadnezzar was a great and, in general, a very wise king, but he also had the pride and hastiness which come with the love which his nation represents, and these for a time got the better of

him. However, when he came to himself and was restored to his royal dignity, he was wise enough to accept the lesson which had been taught him, and his last statement in the Bible story (Daniel 4:37) is: "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase."

The last words of this statement are a fitting introduction to our story for today. For Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's son, did walk in pride. Nebuchadnezzar was a great enough man to be capable of humility before the Lord, but Belshazzar's pride did not hesitate to use the vessels of the temple of the Lord to minister to his own vanity. It is not hard to see what this act pictures. When we form too high an opinion of ourselves, we become anxious to prove that our word is law, and we may even become so filled with the idea of our own importance that we use our knowledge of the Word and of spiritual things—which is what the vessels of the temple represent—to make other people admire and flatter us. When we do this, the Lord cannot reach us by means of His Word and save us. Our spiritual death has become certain.

The sudden appearance of the disembodied hand which wrote upon the wall frightened Belshazzar, but neither he nor his wise men could interpret the writing. Then his wife—who represents such affection for truth as remained to him—remembered Daniel. But, although the king recognized that Daniel had told him the truth and gave Daniel the promised reward, he could not save himself. Daniel's prophecy was fulfilled that very night. Belshazzar was slain and Darius the Mede* took over his kingdom.

This illustrates a point which Swedenborg makes more than once—that no one is regenerated in a state of fear or compulsion. We may be frightened or forced into checking an evil course of action, but our desire to pursue it is not at the same time changed. And when we come into the other world, if our ruling love is selfish,

*There is no historical record of a king called Darius the Mede (5:31 [H.B. 6:1])—also called "the son of Ahasuerus" (9:1). —Ed.

we shall choose to live in hell. Belshazzar committed profanation. Read carefully the quotation from *Divine Providence* which follows the Adult notes.

Adult

It might be well to call for questions on the chapter immediately after your brief introduction on the Major Prophets in general. The questions will show the particular phase of the lesson which will be of most interest and value to the class. The teacher should be thoroughly prepared.

As we all know, the four Major Prophets are called "Major" only because of the length of their books as compared with those of the twelve Minor Prophets. The length of the books also gives us more knowledge about the men themselves than we should otherwise have. We know when and where and approximately how long each one prophesied. The first one, Isaiah, appears also in the second book of Kings in connection with the account of the reign of Hezekiah in Judah. In our lesson on the fall of Judah we had occasion to speak of Jeremiah, who was the Lord's prophet in Judah at that time. Jeremiah was spared by the king of Babylon because he had advised the people to submit and pay tribute and remain in their homes, but afterward some of those who were left in the land fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them against his will. The Lamentations of Jeremiah were written in Egypt and were for this reason classed by the ancient Jews among the Tehillim or Writings instead of with the Prophets—where they belong.

Ezekiel and Daniel were among the captives carried away to Babylon. Ezekiel was a priest and Daniel one of those of royal blood who were selected at Nebuchadnezzar's command at the time of his first victory in Judah and brought to Babylon along with part of the treasure of the temple. In Daniel 1:4 we have a description of Daniel and his companions: "Children in whom was no blemish, but well favored, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach

the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans." The book of Daniel contains several chapters of consecutive narrative which afford striking stories to teach to children, and in the letter the book is easier to follow and to understand than most of the strictly prophetic books of the Word.

Earlier we have compared Joseph's character and his rise to power in Egypt with the story of Daniel in Babylon. They are strikingly similar. Like Joseph, Daniel became a captive as a very young man but, because he was absolutely faithful to his own God, he was protected by the Lord and given the power to interpret dreams which eventually brought him to the notice of the king and led to his becoming a ruler in the land of his captivity. Daniel's contemporary fame is attested by two references to him in Ezekiel 14:14 and 28:3. The last few chapters of the book of Daniel are accounts of his own visions, which in the spiritual sense are prophetic of the whole history of the church from his own time to the Second Coming and the Last Judgment, and in the last chapter he is ordered to "seal the book, even to the time of the end." This connects with the opening of the seals in the fifth chapter of Revelation.

We recall that Babylon represents the love of dominion and that Swedenborg usually interprets it as applying to a particular church in which from love of dominion holy things have been made to serve the ambitions of men and so have been profaned. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image, the subject of our lesson from Daniel last year, pictured the gradual vastation of that church. The history of the spiritual Babylon is very clearly described in AE 1029. In paragraph 10 of this number a part of our chapter for today is quoted, and we are told that "the church of the Lord (in which the love of dominion rules) successively becomes Babylon; and that as it becomes Babylon so it is devastated as to all the good of love and all the truth of faith; and that this is its end, that is, it is no longer a church; and when it is no longer a church it is reckoned among the idolatrous nations, except those in it who worship the Lord, regard the Word as holy, and admit instruction from it."

Daniel had said, in interpreting the dream of the image, that

Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold. Nebuchadnezzar's dealings with Judah and in particular with Daniel show him to have been in general a wise king, but he had the pride and love of dominion which characterized his nation. They led him astray more than once, as in the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in chapter 3 and again more seriously in the events of chapter 4, to which verses 18 to 21 of our chapter for today refer. Nevertheless each time Nebuchadnezzar accepted his lesson, recognized his fault, and humbled himself before the God of Daniel. He was the head of gold of the image.

Belshazzar, the son of Nebuchadnezzar, had all his father's pride and love of dominion but none of his wisdom. Nebuchadnezzar had kept the treasures of the temple which he had brought from Jerusalem laid up with his own treasures in the house of his god. Belshazzar brought them out and profaned them. His act is referred to in DP 231 (see below), which is a study of various kinds of profanation. There Swedenborg lists seven kinds of profanation of varying degrees of seriousness. Belshazzar's is the fifth kind, which is committed by those "who attribute to themselves what is Divine." It is one of the depths to which the love of dominion in a person may lead, one which brings about the destruction of the church—of everything spiritual—in him. Belshazzar could be frightened by the appearance of the strange hand and by the writing which he could not understand, but they did not change him. We are told in the writings that no one is regenerated in a state of fear.* It is by our daily free choices that we gradually form the character which will be ours to eternity. Our most subtle and deadly foe is arrogance and the love of rule.

The most striking part of our chapter is, of course, the writing on the wall. In AR 313 we read: "By 'drinking from the gold and silver vessels of the temple of Jerusalem,' and at the same time worshiping other gods, signifies the profanation of good and truth; as also by 'Babylon.' By 'Mene,' or to number, is signified to know

*See, e.g., DP 139, 282, AE 1155³. But cf. AC 8925. —Ed.

his quality as to truth; by ‘Thekel,’ or to weigh, is signified to disperse.” The words in verse 25 are in Chaldee, the language of Babylon, which is a language very similar to the Hebrew. The word *Peres*, which Daniel appears to substitute for the word *Upharsin*, is merely the simple form of the same word. The *U* in *Upharsin* means “and,” and the other changes in the word are phonetic and grammatical. The *International Bible Dictionary* suggests that the change to *Peres* may have been made “to suggest the empire of the ‘Persians,’ whose empire was to supersede that of Babylon.” The king who followed Darius on the throne was Cyrus the Persian.

Daniel the prophet of course represents the Word of God; and we may think of the whole story of Daniel as a picture of how the Word of God is protected, manifests its power, and actually dominates the affairs of the world even among those who profess to be independent of it or to reject it altogether.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Divine Providence, n. 231: “As profanation of what is holy means profanation by those who know the truths of faith and the goods of charity from the Word, and who in some measure acknowledge them, and does not mean those who are ignorant of these, nor those who from impiety wholly reject them, so what now follows is said of the first class, and not of the others. Of the profanation of such there are several kinds, some lighter and some more grievous; but they may be referred to these seven. The first kind of profanation is committed by those who make jests from the Word and about the Word, or from the Divine things of the church and about them. . . . The second kind of profanation is committed by those who understand and acknowledge Divine truths, and still live contrary to them. . . . The third kind of profanation is committed by those who adapt the sense of the letter of the Word to the confirmation of evil loves and false principles. . . . A fourth kind of profanation is committed by those who say with the lips pious and holy things, and counterfeit the affections of love for these in tone and in gesture, and yet in heart do not believe and love them. . . . The fifth kind of profanation is committed by those who attribute to themselves what is Divine. . . . Babylon and Chaldea are mentioned in many places in the Word, ‘Babylon’ meaning the profanation of good, and ‘Chaldea’ the profanation of truth; both of these in such as attribute to themselves what is Divine. . . . The sixth kind of

profanation is committed by those who acknowledge the Word and yet deny the Divinity [*Divinum*] of the Lord. . . . The seventh kind of profanation is committed by those who first acknowledge Divine truths and live according to them, but afterwards recede and deny them. This is the worst kind of profanation . . .”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. What is a prophet? *one who speaks for the Lord*
- J. Why did the Lord send prophets to the people of Israel and Judah?
rebuke, warn
- P. What prophets do you remember who did not write books of the Word?
Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, Ahijah
- P. What is the difference between (1) “Major,” and (2) “Minor” Prophets?
(1) longer, (2) shorter
- P. Who were the four Major Prophets? *Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel*
- J. When and where did Isaiah live? *Judah, Hezekiah's time*
- J. When and where did Jeremiah live? *Judah, time of Babylonian captivity*
- J. Where did Jeremiah die? *probably in Egypt*
- J. Who wrote the book of Lamentations? *probably Jeremiah*
- J. Where was it written? *Egypt*
- P. Where did Ezekiel and Daniel prophesy? *in captivity*
- J. What was Ezekiel's occupation? *priest*
- J. Where was he sometimes taken in vision? *Jerusalem*
- J. What power did the Lord give Daniel? *to interpret dreams*
- P. Why was He able to give Daniel this ability? *he was faithful to the Lord*
- J. Who was king of Babylon when Daniel was first brought there?
Nebuchadnezzar
- J. How did he happen to make Daniel a ruler in the kingdom? *interpreted dreams*
- J. Of what other well-known person in the Bible story does this remind us?
Joseph
- J. Who followed Nebuchadnezzar on the throne of Babylon? *Belshazzar*
- P. What great sin did he commit? *profaned temple vessels*
- P. What happened that frightened him? *hand writing on wall*
- J. What were the words written on the wall? *MENE, MENE, TEKEL,
UPHARSIN*
- J. What did Daniel tell him they meant? *measured, weighed, divided*
- P. When was Daniel's prophecy fulfilled? *same night*
- I. What does Belshazzar's act represent? *selfish use of spiritual knowledge*
- S. What does the writing on the wall represent? *judgment from the Word*

DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN

Daniel 6

For the younger classes the introduction to today's lesson should go back to the lesson on the conquest of Judah. Then review the previous lessons on Daniel.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord is able to protect those who obey Him.

Part of the prophetic Word was given outside of the Holy Land, contrary to the belief of the Jews.

Faith in the Lord makes a person fearless.

A person who really wants to do right may make careless mistakes.

Innocence is a safeguard.

Notes for Parents

As we have noted, when Nebuchadnezzar first conquered Judah, several years before the final captivity, he had a few of the most promising young princes of the royal household of Judah brought to Babylon to be trained in the language and learning of the Chaldeans. Among these was Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar did not treat these young men as prisoners but had them cared for as members of his own household.

Daniel and three others—whose Chaldean names were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—were outstanding because from the very first they refused to do anything which was forbidden by the religious law in which they had been brought up before they left home. For this reason the Lord could be with them. You have read the story of how He saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when they were cast into the fiery furnace. To Daniel He gave the ability to interpret dreams and the gift of prophecy, and because of these powers Daniel became chief ruler in the kingdom.

Even after Babylon in its turn was conquered by Darius the Mede,

Daniel was continued in his office, and our story today is of the plot formed by his subordinate officers and its results. This is one of the most familiar stories in the Bible and it teaches us several lessons. The most important, of course, is that if we faithfully learn and obey the Lord's will, the Lord will be with us and save us from all the false and evil things which would destroy our souls. Anyone who has been tempted to do what he knew to be wrong knows what "lions" are, and we have all had some experience with being saved from them by the Lord's help.

Another lesson is very clear. Whoever tries to injure someone else is bound to injure himself instead. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

And the part of Darius in the story teaches us two more lessons. The first is that we should never make an important decision without stopping to think. And the second is that when anyone has the courage to stand firmly by his principles in the face of danger, he may lead others to acknowledge the Lord and to change their own lives for the better.

Primary

The children should be reminded of the history and character of Daniel, with emphasis on his courage in doing what was right in the midst of temptation. Then read the story from the Word. Emphasize verses 25-28 and make the point that when we do right, other people are often led to a better state of thought and feeling.

When king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered Judah, he at first tried to keep things there very much as they were. Although he carried off some of the treasure, he did not take most of the people away at that time. But he did have a few of the most promising young princes brought to Babylon to be trained in his own court. One of these young princes was Daniel.

You know some children are very easily persuaded by their playmates to do things they know are wrong. Daniel was not like that. He was very brave and honest, and he went right on worshiping the Lord in Babylon just as he had at home in Jerusalem. So

the Lord gave Daniel great wisdom and the ability to interpret dreams and to foretell the future. And He made him His prophet to speak words of warning to the kings of Babylon.

The Lord gave him power to interpret dreams.

Through this power he became one of the rulers in Babylon.

Do you remember someone else who rose to power in the same way?

Later, under king Darius, the princes of Babylon became jealous of Daniel.

What law did they persuade Darius to sign?

What did Daniel do?

Did the king want Daniel killed?

How did the king show his grief?

How was Daniel saved?

How did Darius punish the princes?

When we try to hurt other people, we are very likely to find that we ourselves are the ones who get hurt.

Junior

The teacher should be familiar with the first five chapters of Daniel in order to cover the whole story of Daniel with confidence, drawing as much as possible on the memory of the pupils. The moral lessons for the Juniors are suggested in the Junior notes. Have the class look up and read the Bible references in the last paragraph of their notes.

What nation conquered Judah?

Who was the king of Babylon at that time?

Nebuchadnezzar did not destroy Judah when he first conquered it. He wanted to rule over all the countries he could, but he was a wise king and would have let the people of Judah alone if they had only obeyed him and paid the tribute money he required. Jeremiah the prophet advised them to do this, but they kept rebelling and so forced Nebuchadnezzar to his final treatment of them.

We learn from Daniel 1:1-4 that at the time of his first conquest of Judah Nebuchadnezzar had several of the most promising young princes of Judah brought to Babylon to continue their education in his court. He did not treat them as captives, but made careful provision for their support and training. Four of these young men

became distinguished from the others by the fact that they refused to break the religious law in regard to food and continued faithfully in the worship of the Lord, in which they had been instructed by the priests in Jerusalem. You will find the names of these four in Daniel 1:6-7.

Because of their faithfulness the Lord was able to protect and help these four young men. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, because they would not worship the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar had set up as an idol, were cast into the fiery furnace, the Lord saved them. This story is found in Daniel 3. Later Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream and Nebuchadnezzar made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon.

In what ways is the story of Daniel like that of Joseph?

Daniel was somewhat overlooked during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar's son Belshazzar, but he came into prominence again at the end of Belshazzar's reign, when he read and interpreted the writing on the wall and prophesied Belshazzar's death and the conquest of his kingdom by the Medes and Persians. Darius the Mede, who followed Belshazzar as king, recognized Daniel's ability.

What office did Darius give Daniel?

How did the other presidents and princes feel about it?

Why could they not find any fault with Daniel?

In what way did they decide they could catch him?

What was peculiar about the laws of the Medes and Persians?

Did Daniel obey the new law?

How did the king feel about it?

How did he show his grief?

How was Daniel saved from the lions?

What became of the men who had plotted against him?

What new decree did Darius make?

This story teaches us several lessons. One is that when we try to injure others, we are very likely to injure ourselves instead. Another is that we should never let ourselves be hurried into doing something we may afterward be sorry for. "Stop and think" is a good rule. Like Darius, if we do not stop and think about the possible

consequences, we may do something foolish just because other people suggest it. Another lesson is that if we do right, the Lord can save us from the many dangers which the evils in the world create. And finally the end of the chapter teaches us that when we have the courage to do right, no matter what the people who happen to be around us want us to do, we may be the means of leading others to see what is right and do it.

The rest of the book of Daniel tells of several prophetic visions which he had. A prophet is one who speaks for the Lord. Daniel spoke for the Lord not only to the people of Babylon but to us and to people of all time. The Lord Himself tells us in Matthew 24:15 that Daniel prophesied even the conditions which would exist in the church at the time when the Lord would find it necessary to make His Second Coming. You might also read Daniel 12:4 and then Revelation 5:1. You see, Daniel was a truly great prophet as well as a great man in the eyes of the people of his own time, as the prophet Ezekiel—who was a contemporary of Daniel—shows us. Read Ezekiel 14:14.

Intermediate

The general correspondence of this story is simple, and the lesson is an important one for this age group. They need to be led and helped in every possible way to feel that the brave thing to do is to stand up for what is right, no matter how many arguments are advanced to persuade them to do wrong.

The ancient Hebrews did not consider the book of Daniel to be among their most sacred scriptures because Daniel received his call to be a prophet after he left Jerusalem, and the whole book was written in Babylon. They felt that only in the Holy Land could a prophet be inspired. But in Matthew 24:15 the Lord Himself calls Daniel a prophet and tells us that his prophecies even extended to the state in which the world would be at the time of the Second Coming. All the prophets were inspired by the Lord; that is, they spoke words which they knew the Lord chose. They sometimes had their ideas of what their messages meant to the people of their

own time, but they did not understand the spiritual and eternal meaning within them. Daniel himself tells us this in the last six verses of his book.

As we learn from Daniel 1:1-7, Daniel was among the first to be taken away from Jerusalem to Babylon, several years before the final captivity, and he was a very young man at the time. But, like all the children of the royal household, he had been taught by the priests. The fact that he and his three close companions were determined to be faithful to their own religion brought them several times into great danger, but each time the final result was that they were singled out for great honor. For the Lord could be with them. There is a very important lesson in this for us. We are often thrown among associates who have not been brought up in the high principles of our own church, and it may seem that we shall be unpopular and ridiculed if we do not do as they do. But if we have the courage to stand by our principles, we shall presently find that we are respected and looked upon as leaders, and our leadership will be for good instead of for evil.

Our lesson for today gives us a clear illustration of this. The throne of Babylon had finally been seized by Darius the Mede, but because Daniel had prophesied that this would happen (Daniel 5:25-31), Darius gave him the highest office in his new dominion. The law which was suggested by the jealous men who found themselves under Daniel we may think of as expressing what worldly people often say or think of a spiritual person with whom they can find no actual fault and who seems to be getting along well: "Just wait! This unworldliness or spiritual mindedness is all very well in theory, but you have to look out for yourself first or everyone else will get the better of you." The Medes represent those who are against the truths and goods of the church. Darius, when he signed the law, did not even think of Daniel. He was flattered, and signed without even stopping to think. Do we ever do things like that? It was accepted as a fact that the laws of the Medes and Persians could not be changed once they were signed. What we do cannot be undone. No matter how sorry we may be afterward and

no matter how we ourselves may change through repentance, the words and acts have had an effect which cannot be wiped out.

So Daniel was cast into the lions' den and the mouth of the den was sealed. Lions appear very often in the Bible story, and like everything else there they have a good and a bad correspondence. The lion is recognized as a symbol of strength and power, and power is in truth. In its highest sense the lion stands for the Lord as divine truth. He is called the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" in Revelation 5:5. And in its next sense it represents the power of falsity used to support the love of self. When we want very much to do something which we really know is wrong, we always try to find reasons for doing it which will seem to be true. These are the "lions" of our story. You may remember that a lion stood in the way of Samson when he went down to the Philistine country. He was able to kill it because his hair had not yet been cut, his hair representing the commandments. As long as we keep the commandments, the "lions" of false reasoning cannot hurt us.

Daniel was shut up over night in the lions' den. We have to meet our temptations ourselves. Other people may advise and try to help us—as Darius did Daniel in verse 16—but no one can make our decision for us. We have to stand alone. The night always pictures a state of mental darkness and doubt. But the morning is the dawn of a new bright state when we see things clearly as they really are. In the morning Daniel said: "My God hath sent his angel and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me." Innocence means having done no harm, and it exists when we trust in the Lord and obey Him and do not set up our own judgment instead. When we are in innocence, the Lord's power can act through and in us and "shut the lions' mouths." False reasonings will be seen as foolish and will be without any power over us.

Daniel's enemies were then destroyed by the lions. Evil always returns to the person who tries to injure another. And Darius recognized Daniel's God as the greatest God and commanded all his people to worship Him. We should try to recognize our temptations

and overcome them not only for our own sakes but because our victory will lead others to acknowledge the Lord and follow Him.

Basic Correspondences

the Medes = those who are against the truths
and goods of the church

lions = the power of truth (or falsity)

Senior

Try to impress the young people with the danger of thinking too well of oneself, and with the way in which pride grows and destroys all wisdom. Try also to inspire them with the desire to emulate Daniel's faithfulness, and leave them with the feeling that only a weak person allows his associates to lead him to do what he knows to be wrong.

Babylon represents the love of dominion, and it was Babylon which conquered Judah. Judah represents the heart of the person of the church. Judah carried away captive to Babylon is a picture of the heart of a person of the church which has allowed the selfish love of being first and so ruling others to take possession of it. We sometimes may say of a person that he is "carried away" by ambition. Anything or anyone who stands in his way must be destroyed. This is the nature of the love of rule.

Yet we have a familiar proverb, "Pride goeth before destruction," one of the proverbs of Solomon (16:18), and history gives us plenty of illustrations of the truth of this proverb. The book of Daniel shows us how this proverb worked itself out in the actual history of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar, who conquered Judah, had some wisdom in spite of his pride. The first four chapters of Daniel show us that the king was capable of learning by experience that the Lord was after all mightier than he. But his son and successor, Belshazzar, carried his pride to the point of profaning the holy vessels from the temple of Jerusalem and as a result lost his life and his kingdom. This story is told in chapter 5. When pride leads one to think of oneself as superior to God, there comes the "writing on the wall" to show that the end is at hand.

Daniel was the prophet through whom the Lord spoke to the kings of Babylon. Like all the prophets, he represents the Word of God. Ezekiel, who was his contemporary and also one of the captives from Judah, was the prophet who spoke to the people in Babylon. But both actually spoke to all men of all times. What we have learned of the Word remains with us to speak to our minds, however far we have gone astray in the paths of selfishness.

Daniel, we remember, had attained high position in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar because his absolute faithfulness to the Lord had enabled the Lord to give him the ability to interpret dreams and to prophesy. Belshazzar apparently ignored Daniel until he needed someone to interpret the writing on the wall; but Darius the Mede, who took over Belshazzar's kingdom, restored Daniel to the position of first ruler under him. Selfish people often see-saw back and forth in this way between complete disregard of religion and the desire to make use of its obvious power.

Apparently it did not occur to Darius that Daniel would refuse to obey any law he chose to make. So he found himself in a position where he had to choose between giving up the wisest of his counsellors and giving up his pride. Daniel had to be thrown to the lions. This is just the kind of trouble into which pride and self-will bring us. We reach the point at which we will give up what we know to be the wise and right course rather than acknowledge that we have been capable of making a mistake.

Lions are symbols of power—in a good sense the power of truth and in a bad sense the power of falsity. When we allow ourselves to be led by false counsellors and by our own pride into the idea that the Word is to be judged like any other book as a product of human intelligence, we are “throwing Daniel into the den of lions.”

But it was not Daniel who was killed. In a way this story is a summary of the history of the treatment of the Bible by the Christian Church. It was at first recognized and set up as ruler, but from the beginning many men in many ways have tried to destroy it, and as a result these men have lost their spiritual lives, while the Bible still stands unscathed. We should recognize from this fact, if

from no other consideration, that it is the Word of God. If doubts come into our minds because of arguments advanced by humanists, we may think of them as the darkness of the night during which Daniel was shut up in the den, and we may know that in the morning our doubts will be dispelled.

"My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lion's mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me." If we are faithful through this temptation to be deceived by specious reasonings, as Daniel was faithful, recognizing our own weakness and sinfulness and looking to the Lord for guidance and strength—which is to be innocent—the false reasonings which seem so strong in the world around us will have no power to hurt or even to disturb us.

The outstanding lesson of the book of Daniel is the effect of Daniel's courageous faithfulness to the Lord upon everyone around him. Daniel made his choice when he was first brought to Babylon as a very young man and stuck to it through every danger and temptation. If we could all, when we are young, realize that the truly brave person is humble before the Lord and stands through thick and thin by what the Lord teaches him is right, we should avoid many pitfalls and reverses and become leaders in bringing about the Lord's kingdom on earth.

Adult

The application of this familiar story to the predicament of many Christians in our modern times will perhaps be the best discussion topic, although some of the lessons suggested in the notes for the younger classes may also be useful. Try to call attention to the points brought out in the last paragraph of the Adult notes. Many people have not noticed the important statements in chapter 12.

The story of Daniel exemplifies the power of obedience to the Word to give wisdom, security, and strength to the individual life. Because of Daniel's absolute faithfulness to the Lord, the Lord could be with him and could speak through him, and for the same reason Daniel came to be recognized as the wisest and most upright

man in the kingdom and retained his high place throughout his life, in spite of many efforts by his enemies to overthrow him. In all this his story parallels that of Joseph.

The story of Daniel in the lions' den is one of the most familiar of the Bible stories. It has a strong appeal for children and young people because of its dramatic quality, and it is well that this is so. For children and young people need to be inspired to stand on their own feet morally and spiritually from the start and not to let themselves be led into wrongdoing by their companions. Children need to learn to recognize and resist temptation on their own level all through their period of physical growth or they develop no independent strength of principle. And the effect of their faithfulness to their principles on other children and young people less fortunate in their training is a point to be taken into account. This, too, the story of Daniel illustrates.

But our chapter has a deeper meaning which is important for us all in these modern times. The love of dominion, which Babylon represents, had actually, under Nebuchadnezzar's son Belshazzar, reached the point at which the holy things of worship were completely profaned by being used to minister to Belshazzar's glory (chapter 5) and Darius the Mede had taken over the kingdom. "Babylon"—whether we think of it as a particular church or as an evil love in general or in the man of any church—seeks to attain its goals by using the things of religion. But as it progresses, there comes a point at which all actual belief in religion is destroyed. Swedenborg tells us that the Medes represent those who are against the truths and goods of the church.

Darius put Daniel at the head of his counsellors because Daniel had predicted that Babylon would fall into his hands. He recognized that Daniel was wiser than his other counsellors and wanted to keep his services, but he had no understanding of the source of Daniel's wisdom. Daniel, like all the prophets, represents the Word. There are many in the world today who recognize that there is great wisdom in the Word but attribute that wisdom to men and think they can use it to further their own ambitions. They are the

"humanists" who think of God as the sum total of men's virtues and achievements. This position is directly "against the truths and goods of the church."

The Word, however, refuses to be fitted into this humanistic scheme of things. Sooner or later these people find themselves faced with the necessity of giving up their pride in their own superior intelligence or giving up the use of the Word for their service, and the Word is rejected altogether. Daniel is sealed up in the den of lions.

Lions in a good sense represent the power of truth, in a bad sense the power of falsity. Daniel remains shut up in their den all night. Because of the treatment the Word has received at the hands of those who wish to exalt human intelligence, many good people today are in darkness and doubt as to its source and credibility. But sooner or later the morning dawns. Very early in the morning, when the king went to the den to learn Daniel's fate, Daniel said, "My God hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me." With whatever falsities men seek to destroy the Word, it stands perennially secure. In our morning state we see this. "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them," as the 119th Psalm tells us. And the peace we have through our trust in the Word has its effect even upon those who have not regarded the Word as holy. Read verses 25 to 28 of our chapter.

In Matthew 24:15 the Lord Himself tells us that Daniel's prophecies even treated of the time of the Last Judgment and the Second Coming. The five chapters which follow chapter 6 contain prophetic visions which the Lord gave to Daniel to record. These visions treat of the whole history of the first Christian Church. And we should read chapter 12, the final chapter of the book, especially for its connection with chapter 5 of the book of Revelation, which is probably familiar to all of us in the New Church. Even in the letter it gives us a clear statement of the relation of a prophet to his prophecy which is very helpful in our thought about the nature of the Word.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

True Christian Religion, n. 754: "The church is consummated by various means, especially by such things as cause falsity to appear as truth; and when falsity appears to be truth, good that is essentially good, such as is called spiritual good, is no longer possible. The good that is then believed to be good is merely natural good, such as is brought forth by a moral life. The chief cause of the consummation of truth and of good along with it, is the two natural loves that are diametrically opposed to the two spiritual loves, and that are called the love of self and the love of the world. Love of self when it is predominant is the opposite of love to God, and love of the world when it is predominant is the opposite of love to the neighbor. Love of self is a wishing well to oneself alone, and not to any other except for the sake of self; and the same is true of love of the world; and these loves when they are fostered spread like gangrene through the body, gradually destroying every part of it. That such love has invaded the churches is manifest from Babylon and the way it is described (Gen. 11:1-9; Isa. 13, 14, 47; Jer. 1; Dan. 2:31-47, 3:1-7, seq., 6:8-28, 7:1-14; and Apoc. 17 and 18 from beginning to end of both)."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. Who was Daniel? *a young prince who became a prophet*
- J. Why was he first brought to Babylon? *to be educated*
- P. What made him a great man? *his faith in God*
- J. What other nation finally conquered Babylon? *Persia*
- P. Who was its king? *Darius*
- P. What office did he give Daniel? *ruler of land*
- J. Who plotted against Daniel? *other political leaders*
- J. What law did they persuade Darius to sign? *no prayer for thirty days*
- P. What did Daniel do? *prayed as usual*
- P. Did the king want to lose Daniel? *no*
- J. Why could he not change the law? *unchangeable*
- P. How long was Daniel shut up in the lions' den? *all night*
- P. How was he saved? *angel*
- P. What happened to his enemies? *thrown to lions*
- J. What new law did Darius make? *everyone worship Daniel's God*
- I. What do all the prophets represent? *the Word of God*
- S. What does a lion represent in a good and in a bad sense? *power of truth, power of falsity*

THE MINOR PROPHETS

Joel 3:9-21

This is a survey lesson primarily for background. All the classes should know the difference between the major and the minor prophets, how many of each there were, and where their books are found in the Bible. Even the youngest children should be able to say that a prophet is one who speaks for the Lord, and all above the Primaries should know the general tenor of a prophet's message.

Doctrinal Points

It is not the Lord who judges us; we judge ourselves by our own choices.

Anyone who reads the Bible believing it to be the Word of God and wishing to live as the Lord would have him live receives enlightenment from it.

Faith is not genuine unless we try to live according to the truth we learn.

Any selfish feeling, if unacknowledged and unchecked, leads to more and more selfishness.

Notes for Parents

We are all familiar with the Lord's command in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:20): "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." And the Gospel of Mark (Mark 9:45-46) describes hell as a place "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." In the New Church we believe that hell-fire is not a physical fire but the same fire that, as we sometimes say, "burns us up" when we are angry and resentful because we think we have been injured. And the worm that does not die is the same worm that is at work when we say, for example, that someone is just "eaten up" with jealousy. We all know that a

person really can let little petty jealousies, or selfish indulgences, or feelings of resentment eat into his soul until there is nothing left there of kindness or unselfishness or happiness. That is what the Lord means when He says through the prophet Joel (Joel 1:4): "That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten."

The twelve books of the Minor Prophets, the last twelve books of the Old Testament, are very short, but they are full of practical lessons for us, once we realize that in them the Lord is speaking to us and not just to a nation and time of long ago.

Joel warns us that the "day of the Lord," the day of judgment, is sure to come to each one of us, but it is not something far off which we can forget about most of the time. We are making our own judgment day by day as we choose to be selfish or unselfish, kind or unkind, proud or humble in the little affairs of everyday life. Every day is judgment day, for every day we are forming the character which we are going to keep to eternity. So Joel tells us to fight these enemies within ourselves now. He says: "Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong." And he is describing all of us as we are every day when he says: "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."

This last verse is a good one for all of us to learn and remember. Teach it to the children and tell them what it means, and then whenever you see them hesitating, trying to decide whether to be good or naughty—and we do often see that in them, and in ourselves too—just remind them: "The day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision." When you say that, because it is a verse from the Word the Lord is speaking through you to the child and the effect is much greater than if you used your own words.

Primary

Spend part of the time showing the children the twelve books of the Minor

Prophets in the Bible, reading the names, and calling attention to the length. Read the first verse of a book whenever it includes, "The word of the Lord came," or, "The vision," in order to impress upon the children the fact of revelation. Have them learn the names *Hosea*, *Malachi*, and *Joel*. Then follow the outline given in their notes and questions.

We have learned that there were four prophets called the "Major Prophets": *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel*, and *Daniel*. Each one of these four is a long book in our Bible. Ask someone to show you where these books are in the Bible, and see how long they are.

In addition to the four Major Prophets there were twelve *Minor* Prophets.

Their books were so short that all twelve could be written on one scroll.

They are the last twelve books of the Old Testament.

Read their names in the Bible and then see how many you can remember.

Try to remember at least the first and the last.

You can also easily remember *Joel*, from whose book our lesson for today is taken.

How many chapters are there in the book of *Joel*?

What is the very first verse of the first chapter?

You see, *Joel*, like *Ezekiel*, said that his words were given him by the Lord.

He pointed out the sad state into which the people of Judah had fallen.

Next he warned them of the disaster that was to come.

He told them to fight against their evils.

Finally he prophesied that the Lord would spare the good and would someday restore His church.

Now let us read verse 14. *Multitudes* means "a great many people," and *decision* means "making up one's mind about what to do." Can you guess what the "valley of decision" is? It is just where every one of us is every time we are trying to decide whether to do right or wrong; and the Lord is very near us then, trying to help us to decide to do right.

The valley of decision is the life we live every day here on earth.

Almost every hour of the day we have a decision to make between right and wrong.

The Lord is always near us trying to help us decide to do right.

Remember this whenever you feel like being naughty.

Junior

With this class do more with the facts that are known concerning the Minor

Prophets and with the general characteristics of the prophetic function. The lesson in Joel 3:14 is important.

The last twelve books in the Old Testament are called the "Minor" Prophets. This is because they are very short books—Obadiah has only one chapter—and the whole twelve were written on one scroll. Several of them are records of a single vision or prophecy each, but in some there are prophecies extending over a considerable period of time. All of them make the definite claim to inspiration and have always been so accepted.

Some of the Minor Prophets date and place themselves, giving the names of the kings of Israel or Judah in whose reign the prophecies were given. Others do not. Scholars have differed as to the time of these undated books, but the order in which they were originally placed, which is the same in our Bibles, is felt by many to be substantially correct with the exception of the book of Obadiah, which is believed to belong to the period of the captivity. Hosea, Amos, and Jonah were prophets in Israel and Amos also prophesied in Judah. The first three and Jonah were contemporaries, living in the period around 800 B.C. The last three, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, prophesied in Judah after the return from captivity. Haggai, especially, was the prophet who urged completing the rebuilding of the temple. Several of the Minor Prophets were given messages concerning the coming of the Messiah. The fourth chapter of Malachi, the last chapter in the Old Testament, is such a prophecy. We shall refer to it when we begin the study of the Gospel of Mark.

The prophet Joel, from whose book we are taking our assignment for today, is believed to have lived in Judah in the time of king Uzziah, who was the third king before Hezekiah. Joel, like all the other prophets, was sent to point out the sins into which the people had fallen. Read the first four verses of the first chapter. Now read Matthew 6:19 and Mark 9:43-44, 47-48. You see the Lord Himself spoke in the same language in which Joel spoke, pointing out to us that our many little selfish desires and wrong thoughts are just like destructive insects which eat up the good

things in us and finally, if we let them have their way, destroy all our possibilities for heavenly character.

After this, like the other prophets, Joel is given a promise of restoration for the good. Read chapter 2:21-32. This is a famous passage, especially because part of it was quoted by the Apostle Peter (Acts 2:16-21) on the day of Pentecost when the Apostles were given the "gift of tongues."

In the part of the third chapter which we have taken for our lesson, Joel shows the people just what the coming of the Messiah will mean to every individual. The prophecy was fulfilled when Christ came into the world. The selfish and evil found His coming a great threat, and they crucified His physical body, hoping in that way to get rid of Him. But the good, who longed for the truth to teach them how to live rightly, found in Him their full satisfaction and joy.

Do you think this all happened a long time ago and doesn't have anything to do with us? Do you think the Lord provided for the preservation of certain inspired prophecies just as a record of the history of one particular nation? We should know better. All the prophecies recorded in the Bible are messages from the Lord to people of all nations and times, and so they are messages to us. Read verse 14 of our chapter. Every one of us is in the valley of decision every day of our lives in this world. Every day we have choices to make, choices between doing what we know is right and letting our natural selfish feelings govern our words and deeds. And when we are facing these choices, it may help us to choose rightly if we remember that the Lord is always at hand to help us if we look to Him. Choosing what is right from day to day and from hour to hour is the only way to make progress toward the sunshine of heavenly life. The "day of the Lord" is always near us in the valley of decision.

Intermediate

This is a particularly good lesson for children of this age because it is a "difficult" age when children are apt to be especially irritating and parents find

them hard to take. The Sunday school teacher can help a great deal by showing an understanding of how the children feel and putting into their minds thoughts which will help them toward self-control. The pupils' notes on the lesson have been written with this in mind.

The last twelve books of the Old Testament, Hosea to Malachi, are called the Minor Prophets. They are short books—Obadiah has only one chapter—and in the days when the Old Testament was preserved on parchment scrolls they were all written on one scroll. The visions and prophecies which they record were given over a period of about four hundred years, from the time of Uzziah king of Judah, the third king before Hezekiah, until about a hundred and fifty years after the first return from captivity. This means from about 800 B.C. to 400 B.C. Jonah, Hosea, and Amos prophesied in Israel, and Amos also prophesied in Judah. The others all spoke to the people of Judah. Obadiah's prophecy is believed to have been given during the captivity. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi prophesied after the return.

Several of them were contemporaries and also contemporary with one or more of the Major Prophets. We know that there were many prophets all through the history of the children of Israel. We read in several places of "companies" of prophets, and in the Benedictus (which we sometimes sing), it is stated, "As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began." So we are not to suppose that the Lord has spoken to mankind only through those prophets whose names we find in the Word. But we may rightly assume that the message of all those other prophets was a message given by the Lord just to help the people to whom it was originally spoken, while the visions and prophecies recorded in the Word are for all people in all times. So it is not particularly important for us to know just when these Minor Prophets lived or just what they themselves and the people of their time thought their words meant. What is important is to find out what they mean for us.

Joel is one of those whose message describes something that happens to people over and over again, something that may happen

to us if we do not take care.

Did you ever have a day when everything seemed to go wrong, and your mother finally said, "I guess you must have gotten up on the wrong side of the bed this morning"? There was more truth in what she said than you think. Look back over such a day and see what really happened. Perhaps you didn't want to get up; so you were cross. Because you were cross, you were impatient and perhaps you tore something when you were dressing and had to stop and find something else to put on. So you were still crosser when you came downstairs and you found fault with your breakfast and wasted so much time fussing about it that you were almost late for school and forgot to take your homework along. So it went on all day, and all the while you were blaming other people for the things that were happening instead of seeing that it was your own cross, selfish feelings that were spoiling your day. Each mistake made things a little worse. Listen to what Joel says (Joel 1:4): "That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten." Each little cross feeling was like a destructive insect eating away at the good, happy feelings you might have been enjoying.

Joel tells us that if we let such things go on in us, there will come a time when it is too late for us to change. Perhaps you know some elderly person who is always cross and disagreeable. No one likes him and he is not at all happy, but he has become so used to being what he is and to blaming other people for everything that happens to him that he no longer wants to be any different. Do you suppose he was always that way? No; once he was a dear little baby and then an innocent little child. But sometime or other he began to let his selfish feelings grow. Perhaps he got up on the wrong side of the bed one morning and just let himself keep on going from bad to worse until now he cannot change. When he dies, he will not be able to enjoy heavenly happiness, because he has lost the ability to be unselfish.

Joel calls the time when the final separation between the good

and the evil is made "the day of the Lord." Read Mark 13:32-37. Some people think of the "day of the Lord" as meaning only the day when the Lord was born into the world. That was indeed a day of judgment. But we should notice that even at that time it was not the Lord who judged the people: they judged themselves. The ones who had remained loving and unselfish welcomed the Lord and followed Him. Those who had lost all interest in anything but themselves hated and crucified Him.

The "day of the Lord" comes for each one of us when we finish our life in this world, and we need to remember that every day each of us is forming himself into the kind of person he will be forever. So in a sense every day is a day of the Lord. The part of the third chapter of Joel which we have for our lesson starts with a "call to arms." What it means is that we should look at ourselves honestly and recognize the faults that are threatening our happiness, and fight them now while we can. For selfishness and good cannot live together. If we choose the good each day, the Lord can be with us and lead us to happiness, but He cannot make the choice for us. Read verse 14. We are the multitudes. The valley of decision is our everyday life. And the day of the Lord is always near in the valley of decision.

Basic Correspondences

palmerworm = the false destroying the good

locust = falsity of the sensuous

valley of decision = our everyday life

Senior

More should be done in this class with the nature and purpose of the books of the Prophets, pointing out especially the fact that their message is timeless and universal. The teacher should be familiar with all three chapters of Joel and be able to use this book as an example throughout the lesson period.

Now we pass to the Minor Prophets. They are called "Minor" because their books are short. All twelve were written on one scroll, whereas each of the books of the Major Prophets needed

a whole scroll. Several of the books of the Minor Prophets are records of only one vision or message. They all claim to be revelation: in most of them the very first verse contains the words, "The word of the Lord came," or, "The vision which came." They are all accepted as inspired in the Jewish canon of Scripture as well as in ours.

In some of these books the historical place of the prophet is specifically stated, but in several it is not, and scholars have spent much time and effort in trying to place these, and have differed and still differ in their conclusions. Study of the text of Scripture is interesting and useful, but scholars may be wrong. They are handicapped by the fact that they assume the prophecy to be limited in its statements to things which the prophet himself has witnessed, rejecting the implications of inspiration. For example, Joel speaks of a plague of destructive insects and a drought, and the attention of the scholars is directed toward finding out when in history such physical conditions prevailed. But we know that the conditions which Joel describes are pictures of spiritual conditions which may be present at any time in the life of the individual or of the world. So it does not really matter particularly just when Joel lived or just what his message meant to the people of his day.

We have noted before that all the prophets had the same function: to point out the evils in the heart and the falsities in the mind, to warn of the inevitable results of persistence in the wrong course, and at the same time to assure the good of the Lord's constant presence and protection, and to promise them eternal happiness if they remained faithful through their trials and temptations. We know that from the beginning there were prophets (Luke 1:70), many prophets of whose names and messages no record has been preserved. We may assume that the message of these unremembered prophets was specifically to the people of their own nation and time. But the prophecies which, under divine providence, have been preserved in the Word are shown by that very fact to have been spoken by the Lord to all men in all times. It is not their meaning for the ancient Jews which we should look for, but their

meaning for us.

Swedenborg tells us that anyone who reads the Bible reverently, believing it to be the Word of God and desiring to find in it the truth which will show him how to live rightly, receives enlightenment from the Lord to the extent of his ability and need. This has proved true throughout the history of the Christian Church. In the Minor Prophets, for example, devout men have always found many verses, such as Micah 6:8, which even in the letter were clear directives for life, and they have also found some verses, such as Joel 2:25, in which the inner meaning shone through the letter so clearly that they have brought comfort and strength. Our early American literature is especially full of references to the Minor Prophets.

But it is only the knowledge of the law of correspondence, revealed by the Lord in His Second Coming, which "opens" these books and makes every verse applicable to our daily lives. In Revelation 10:7 it is prophesied that one day "the mystery of God should be finished." That day came when the Lord opened the Word. This does not mean that if we know the law of correspondence, every verse in the Minor Prophets will be clear to us as soon as we read it. In order really to understand the inner meaning of any verse in Scripture we not only have to study but we have to have reached the point in our regeneration at which that particular verse will be accepted by us and used for further progress. But with even a little honest study we can know the general meaning throughout, and we need such knowledge for our daily life and as a preparation for experiences yet to come.

So, for example, we can see in the book of Joel the teaching that the little selfish desires and wrong thoughts to which we yield day by day are like an army of destroying insects coming across a fruitful land. They eat up the good things that are developing in us and they keep our minds closed against the truth we should be receiving, causing spiritual drought. We see people in our communities, and in the newspapers we read about others, who have gone far astray into degenerate living and crime, and we sometimes

wonder how they could have reached such a state. Read Joel 1:8-13 and see how it expresses their condition and the feeling people have about them. None of them came into that state all at once; it was little by little, day by day, as they let the destroying thoughts and feelings control their minds and hearts.

In the second chapter Joel speaks of the coming of the "day of the Lord." This pictures the time when our opportunity to change our life is over, when we have made ourselves the kind of people we shall be to eternity. For the evil it is a terrible and tragic day. Even for the good it is a day in which they realize how many opportunities they have wasted and how far short they are of what they ought to be; but since they recognize their weakness and need and look to the Lord, there is the beautiful promise in verses 18 to 27, teaching that the Lord will spare them and bring them into heavenly happiness.

Then follows chapter 3, in which the two states—that of the evil and that of the good—are summed up and shown in clear contrast, and we are presented with the choice and taught that we are making our choices now, every day of our lives as we resist our little everyday temptations or yield to them. The case in which we all find ourselves during our lives in this world is pictured for us in verse 14, which we should learn and think about often: "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."

Adult

Since most of us are inclined to ignore the Minor Prophets, except perhaps for the story of Jonah and certain clear and well-known verses in the others, the point to be stressed is that there is no part of the Word which does not have a message for us if we are willing to study it, using the means which the Lord has provided in His Second Coming. The book of Joel can be used to show how much practical help is in these books for us.

The last twelve books in the Old Testament are known as the Minor Prophets. Of these books William Hayden in *Our Heavenly Father's Book* says:

[They] are placed in the Hebrew canon as one volume, or book, being written on a single roll or manuscript. This was done for convenience, on account of their brevity; the whole amounting to little more than the contents of a single book of some of the larger prophets, as Isaiah or Ezekiel. Neither the nature of their contents nor the date of the writings furnish a reason for their being classed together. The earliest one probably belongs to the time of Uzziah, eight hundred years B.C.; while the last one may be placed as late as Nehemiah, or 433 B.C. Nor are we certain that the order in which they are placed in our Bible is the exact chronological order in which those prophets lived and wrote, although it is very nearly the same.

Scholars have spent much time and effort on the study of these books, but for the most part their object is to place the books historically, trying to relate the literal statements to specific events in the history of Judah and Israel. Yet simple, devout Bible readers have always found some passages at least directly and clearly meaningful, and we find many verses from these twelve books quoted with effect in our older literature.

In the New Church we know that there is no part of the Word of God which does not have a universal and timeless application. Many prophets, true prophets, have spoken for the Lord to the people of their time "since the world began," and their names passed out of remembrance when their particular mission was over. But it was not so with the prophets through whom the Word was given. Their message was not to their times alone. If we read any one of the Minor Prophets with a general knowledge of correspondence and a sincere desire for instruction, we shall be rewarded beyond our expectation. We are taking the book of Joel as an example in our lesson today. His book is short—only three chapters—and is one of those which contains no definite statement which places it historically. Hayden says of Joel:

Joel, a name formed by contraction from the two Divine names, Jehovah and Elohim, has been by some interpreted to mean *the worshipper of God*. He was a prophet of the Lord. His birthplace is unknown. He was the son of Pethuel, and lived in Judah, and delivered his prophecy in or near Jerusalem. From all that can be learned, most commentators agree in placing him in the reign of Uzziah, King of Judah, about 800 B.C.,

thus making him in part a contemporary of the three prophets, Isaiah, Hosea, and Amos. His book is a single continuous prophecy. Under the figure of an army of locusts, and other destructive insects soon to invade the land, devouring every green thing and leaving the country desolate, he describes the moral desolation of the times, picturing the evil and false things which, creeping into the hearts and minds of men, consume all their good dispositions and true thoughts, leaving only a spiritual waste in the nominal Church. There is an exhortation to repentance, and an assurance that the Lord will come and execute a judgment on all wicked men who thus desolate and destroy the Church, and that He will some day restore genuine fertility by establishing a new Church. It is declared to be a "Word of the Lord" spoken to the prophet from the unseen world. As such, it is quoted in the New Testament. See Acts 2:16, Rom. 10:13. Its place in the canon has never been called in question.

Even this brief summary of the superficial meaning of the book immediately suggests its application to our own lives, if we remember that the condition of the church in the world is such as is its condition in the individuals who compose it. Each one of us is a church in least form. How far is each one of us allowing the palmerworm, the locust, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar to work within him, eating up the good in his heart as fast as it develops and closing his mind against the rain of truth from heaven? We all know, for instance, how a sense of injury—often based on misunderstanding and quite unwarranted—can build up in the mind a barrier between former friends and, feeding on trifles, can, like the swarms of locusts, shut out the sun from the life. How impossible it is to argue with one in such a state! His mind is closed to any truth which would show him his own folly. We know how a bit of idle gossip or a malicious remark, if allowed to go unchallenged, can work in the mind of the bearer as well as of its author and destroy kindness and clear judgment. We do not have to look outside of our own minds and hearts to find this army of destroying insects.

Joel points out the desolation which results and also points out that we may at any time, if we will, check such an unhappy trend in ourselves by turning to the Lord for correction and help, because

the Lord is always at hand. The beautiful promise in Joel 2:23-27 is spoken to each one who will examine himself, recognize his own faults, and fight against them in the Lord's strength.

The particular assignment which is our reading for today is the culmination of Joel's whole message. It is an urgent and immediate call to arms against the evils which are at work in us. The "day of the Lord" in the letter refers to the coming of the Messiah and its result for the ancient Jewish Church. We should note that the Apostle Peter considered this prophecy of Joel fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21). But all the Messianic prophecies have a personal as well as a general meaning. Just as there is a time in the life of every regenerating individual when the Lord was born in his life, so there is a time when a final judgment takes place. It is the day when the seed which we have been developing in this earthly life is fully formed and falls to the ground, the day of our passing out of this world into the spiritual world. In AC 10596 Swedenborg says: "The life of man after death is the life of his love, and the life of his faith; consequently such as has been his love, and such as has been his faith, during his life in the world, such his life remains forever. The life of hell is for those who have loved themselves and the world above all things; and the life of heaven for those who have loved God above all things and the neighbor as themselves. These are they who have faith; but the former are they who have not faith. The life of heaven is what is called eternal life; and the life of hell is what is called spiritual death." This is a very straightforward and plain putting of the case as it is, and it should make us think very soberly. This world is the place where we make our choice. Our life here is given us for that purpose. And what Joel is pointing out to us is that we cannot keep putting off our choice. It is made from day to day and from moment to moment. "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision." What we choose today is of vital importance to us. The moment of decision is always now.

The Lord says the same thing many times in the Scriptures in one way or another, notably in Matthew 24:42-51, in all the par-

ables of the Judgment in Matthew 25, and in Mark 13:32-37, in which we find the words, "Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture, n. 57: "Enlightenment is from the Lord alone, and exists with those who love truths because they are truths and make them of use for life. With others there is no enlightenment in the Word. The reason why enlightenment is from the Lord alone is that the Lord is in all things of the Word. The reason why enlightenment exists with those who love truths because they are truths and make them of use for life, is that such are in the Lord and the Lord in them. For the Lord is His own Divine truth, and when this is loved because it is Divine truth (and it is loved when it is made of use), the Lord is in it with the man . . . 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' These are they who are in enlightenment when they are reading the Word, and to whom the Word shines and is translucent."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. Who were the four Major Prophets? *Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel*
- P. How many Minor Prophets were there? *twelve*
- J. Why are they called "Minor"? *wrote shorter books*
- P. Where do their books come in the Bible? *end of Old Testament*
- J. How do we know they were inspired? *all claim to be the Word of the Lord*
- P. Which is the first of the Minor Prophets? *Hosea*
- P. Which is the last? *Malachi*
- J. Which one is Joel? *second*
- J. How many chapters are there in his book? *three*
- P. How does he describe the evils that work in our hearts? *destructive insects*
- J. What does he call the judgment day? *day of the Lord*
- J. What does the judgment day mean for us? *when we die*
- J. What is the "valley of decision"? *our everyday life*
- J. What does the day of the Lord bring to the evil? *hell*
- J. What does it bring to the good? *heaven*
- I. What would you say is the most important thing we learn from Joel?
every day all of us are forming ourselves into the kinds of persons we will be forever

THE PROPHET AMOS

Amos 8

In this lesson the prophet Amos is studied as an example, but it is really another lesson on the Minor Prophets in general. In all except the youngest class, therefore, the teacher will try to see that the pupils receive the general information first.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord seems to punish, but it is really evil that punishes itself. Part of the purpose of the Word is to warn us of the results of our evils.

Thirst pictures lack of truth.

Famine pictures lack of goodness.

Notes for Parents

The last twelve books in the Old Testament are called the Minor Prophets. They are called "Minor" only because they are very short books, for their message is just as important as any other part of the Word. All the prophets were sent by the Lord to point out to the people the evils into which they had fallen and to warn them what the results would be, and also to encourage the faithful and assure them of salvation. The visions given to some of the prophets were to be written down, even though the prophets themselves did not understand fully what they saw. The words the prophets spoke were chosen by the Lord. They did not speak from themselves. This all the prophets tell us again and again. And what the Lord speaks is meant for all people in all times. So the messages of the prophets are messages from the Lord to each one of us.

Sometimes these messages are clear to us and sometimes we have to study hard to understand them. There are two clear messages in our chapter from the prophet Amos. One is the condemnation of the things the Israelites were doing, which are all things

which people today are still doing. They were oppressing the poor, they were cheating in their business, and they were thinking about their worldly schemes even while they were pretending to worship the Lord. The prophet tells us that all these things are evil and will lead to the destruction of our souls.

The other clear lesson is that there is a kind of hunger and thirst which has nothing to do with material food and drink. It is hunger and thirst of the soul and it is even more demanding than that of the body. And the only thing which can satisfy this spiritual hunger and thirst is "hearing the words of the Lord." Hearing in the Bible—and even with us—means more than just receiving sounds by means of our ears. When you say to one of the children, "Do you hear me?" what you really mean is, "I expect you to mind!" Hearing always involves obedience. If you remember this verse from Amos, you can understand why the Lord tells us, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled," and why He said to the woman of Samaria, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Let us remember how often the Lord said, when He had been talking to the multitude, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

Primary

Show the children the books of the Major and Minor Prophets in the Bible and talk to them about the prophet's mission. Then take up the chapter for today, distinguishing between the vision in the first verse and the message that follows.

Ask your teacher to show you in your Bible the books of the Prophets. The first four of these are long books and so they are called the Major Prophets. These four are named Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Then there are twelve short books. These are called the Minor Prophets. Let us read their names so that you will recognize them when you hear them again.

All the prophets knew that the words they spoke were the Lord's—not their own.

They were messages given them by the Lord to pass on to the people.

They had strange visions, too.

They did not understand what the visions meant, but they knew they were to write them down.

Amos is the third of the Minor Prophets, as the books come in our Bible.

He tells us himself that he was a shepherd who lived in Tekoa, a village near Bethlehem.

He lived in the days of king Uzziah of Judah.

This was some years before king Hezekiah.

In our chapter what did Amos see in vision?

Then what was he told would happen to the people of Israel?

What bad things were they doing?

People today are still tempted to do these very same bad things. Perhaps even you have sometimes wanted to take more than your share of things and to take things that belonged to other children, and to stay at home and play instead of going to Sunday school and church. So you see the Lord is warning us all.

Now read verse 11.

We say sometimes that someone is hungry for love.

And we speak of a thirst for knowledge.

What kind of food and drink does verse 11 tell us our souls need?

Junior

The Juniors may be given much more general information, but the lesson from Amos is also a useful one, both as an example of the prophetic mission and for the basis which verse 11 affords for the presentation of the principle of correspondence. Be sure the children look up all the Bible references in their notes.

Let us look at the prophet Amos as an example of the so-called Minor Prophets. Amos, as we learn from Amos 1:1, lived in the time of king Uzziah of Judah, the third king before Hezekiah (see Isaiah 1:1). Amos came from Tekoa, a village about six miles south of Bethlehem, and he was a shepherd and not one of those men brought up in the schools of the prophets (Amos 7:14-15). But the Lord called him, and gave him words to say to the people

of Israel and of Judah and also to the Edomites, Ammonites, and Moabites.

Most of the prophets were given visions as well as messages. They did not know what they meant, but they did know that they were to write down just what they saw. The chapter we have for today begins with a vision.

What did Amos see?

What prophecy is in verse 2?

Then the Lord pointed out through Amos several of the sins which the people of Israel were committing.

See how many of these sins you can write down.

Notice that the first part of verse 5 shows that the people still observed outwardly some of the laws given through Moses for their worship. Look up the laws about the beginning of the months—the new moon—in Numbers 10:10 and 28:11. You know, of course, what the law of the sabbath was. But they were observing these laws unwillingly and with their minds full of thoughts of their dishonest plans, like people who go to church on Sunday because it makes them appear respectable, but think about their business or their social plans instead of about the service and the sermon, and during the week pay no attention to the commandments. In verse 5 the *ephah* is the name of a dry measure, somewhere between two and three pecks as we measure today. The *shekel* was a weight used for weighing uncoined money. So you can see just how they managed to falsify the balances or scales. Dishonest storekeepers sometimes do the same thing today.

There is one especially interesting verse in our chapter, and that is verse 11. You have been told that all of the Word of God has a “spiritual sense,” that is, an inside meaning relating to our souls. Sometimes this meaning is showed us even in the letter, as it is in this verse. You know that a famine is a great and widespread scarcity of food, and we all know what thirst is. But here we read that the Lord is not speaking of physical hunger and thirst, but of another kind. Look up Matthew 5:6 and John 4:13-14 and see how this verse from Amos helps us to understand them. Did you

ever stop to think why we speak of being "hungry for love" or of a "thirst for knowledge"? It is a form of speech which has come down to us and to people of other languages all over the world from the earliest times, when people knew that everything we see in the world about us is just a working out or expression in nature of things which go on in men's souls. When a nation—like the Israelites, for example—becomes so selfish and disobedient to the Lord that its religion is a mere sham, the few good people who are left have no way of finding out what the Lord really wants them to do. This is the famine that is not "of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord." Read Matthew 15:1-6 and see how the Lord describes what had happened to Judaism by the time He came into the world. But we know from the Gospel story that even then there were good people left—the ones who welcomed the Lord because they wanted to know how to live.

Intermediate

The correspondence of the basket of summer fruit and the nature of the evils which were destroying the church are the principal lessons for this class, but the Intermediates should be impressed by verse 11 as an example of the places in the Word where the spiritual sense is stated in the letter. As other examples the teacher may read to them Revelation 5:8 and 19:8.

When we remember that a prophet is one who speaks for the Lord, we realize that there are things we need to know hidden within all the messages given to the Prophets to speak to the children of Israel, as well as within the visions they saw and recorded. There were, of course, things in the letter which had meaning for the Jews of long ago, but since the spiritual message was always meant to be for all people, there was much which they did not understand. The Prophets themselves had at best only the most external idea of what their visions and words meant—they knew merely that they were given them by the Lord and that they must be spoken and recorded. We ourselves often cannot get more than a glimpse of the inner meaning of the Prophets without a great

deal of study, but in all of them there are some clear statements which apply to our spiritual states and needs as well as to our outward conduct, and in the writings of Swedenborg the Lord in His Second Coming has given us the means of studying further and finding as much of the inner truth as we are prepared to use.

In this lesson we are studying a chapter from Amos as an example. Amos is the third of the Minor Prophets as they appear in our Bible. He lived and prophesied in the time of Uzziah king of Judah (Amos 1:1), who was the third king before Hezekiah. We learn from Isaiah 1:1 that Isaiah also began to prophesy in the days of Uzziah, and the same is said of Hosea in Hosea 1:1. It is thought that Joel and probably Jonah belong to the same period. There is one thing which distinguishes Amos from many of the prophets. He was neither a priest nor one of those brought up in the "schools" of the prophets—called the "sons of the prophets"—but was a herdsman or shepherd (Amos 7:14-15) living, at the time when he was called by the Lord, in the village of Tekoa which was about six miles south of Bethlehem. He was given visions and messages for the people of both Judah and Israel, as well as concerning Edom, Ammon, and Moab. Like all the prophets, he pointed out the evils into which the people had fallen and prophesied the destruction which these evils would bring upon the nation, and he also encouraged the faithful with promises of eventual restoration and happiness.

This last promise comes at the close of the book (Amos 9:11-15), but it is foreshadowed by the vision described in the first verse of chapter 8, which we have for today. Swedenborg tells us that this vision of a basket of summer fruit means that "a new thing of the church comes into existence," and that the next two verses mean that "the old church comes to an end." A basket—which was a regular kind of container for bread and fruit—pictures our will part, which is the part in which we are to hold good. Fruit pictures good works. Summer represents the times when our hearts are warm with charity or love for the neighbor. This vision of the basket of summer fruit is given to show us what the true church is,

so that we may understand how completely the Israelites had perverted their religion and why they could not be allowed to continue as the representative of the Lord's church in the world.

If we study the things said about them in verses 4 to 6, we find that, while they still observed the sabbath and some of the other religious statutes, they were impatient under them and that their hearts were given to greed and oppression. Our worship does us no good if our hearts and minds are not in it and if we do not try in our everyday affairs to act in the spirit of love to the Lord and the neighbor.

Verse 11 of our chapter is one of the places where the spiritual sense comes out in the letter. In giving the Word the Lord saw to it that those who really wanted to understand and do His will would have glimpses of the deeper meaning within the letter. So here He tells us plainly that there is a spiritual hunger and thirst which can be satisfied only by "hearing the words of the Lord." Hearing represents obedience. When your mother says, "Do you hear me?" she means "I expect you to obey." The spiritual famine and thirst were for the means of learning and obeying the truths of the Word. You remember that one of the Blessings is "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." Anyone who keeps this verse from Amos in mind can understand something of the deeper meaning in every passage in the Word in which hunger, thirst, food, and drink are mentioned. We know, too, that the people of the Ancient Church, because they understood the spiritual correspondence of natural things, spoke and wrote to a great extent in the language of correspondence in which the Word is written. That is why so many correspondential expressions have come down into the common speech of all peoples. We all say so naturally "I see," "He has high ideals," "She has a warm heart," "He has a thirst for knowledge," and such things that it does not even occur to us that we are actually using correspondences.

This little study of just one chapter of the book of Amos shows us how much we can get by a little effort with the help of Swedenborg from the books of the Prophets, which may seem to us at first

strange and hard to understand.

Basic Correspondences

a basket = the will part of man as a containant
of good

summer = a state of charity

thirst = desire for truth

the ear and hearing = obedience

Senior

The final lesson for the Seniors should be the possibility of understanding the Prophets if one is willing to study, and the practical value to us of such study.

We are taking Amos as an example of what can be found in the Minor Prophets which is of immediate practical value for our daily lives. We know that the books of the twelve Minor Prophets are all short, that with the exception of the book of Jonah there is very little "story" in them, and that they seem to be for the most part denunciations of the Israelites and others, with a sprinkling of prophecies of the Advent of the Lord. The study of many scholars has been largely an effort to place the books historically by trying to relate their statements to known historical events. But we know that the message of the Lord in the Word is not primarily a message to any one nation or time and is concerned with spiritual rather than with natural events.

The fact, for example, that Amos prophesied in the time of king Uzziah of Judah (Amos 1:1) is included in the text of the Word not for the purpose of identifying the man Amos but to show us that his prophecy relates to the particular stage in the decline of a church or an individual represented by the events and conditions of Uzziah's reign. The fact that he was originally neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but a "herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit" (Amos 7:14) shows us the states of heart and mind which, in such a degenerating period, are open to receive the Word. In such a period the prophets and sons of the prophets are the official spokesmen for the perverted church who, as we read in Isaiah 30:10

(and we note that Isaiah was a contemporary of Amos), are called upon to "speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits," but a herdsman and gatherer of sycamore fruit represents one who is trying to preserve what goodness he has and to do right in his daily life.

In our chapter Amos is first given a vision of a basket of summer fruit. The rest of the chapter, with its denunciation of the people of Israel and the prophecy of their destruction, is such a contrast to this simple, lovely vision that we may not see in the letter any reason for the vision itself at first. Swedenborg in his summary interpretation of the chapter in *Prophets and Psalms* says of verse 1: "A new thing of the church comes into existence," and relates this verse to the general topic "A new church in place of the former." Of verses 2 and 3 he says: "The old church comes to an end," and this is related to the topic "The church totally devastated, and its destruction." The person who is trying to be a true servant of the Lord is first shown the bright promise of what is to come which may support him through the dark days ahead, just as we are given a knowledge of the spiritual world to sustain us when our lives here are difficult. The basket of summer fruit pictures a heart full of charity leading to good works. This is what the true church in a person is.

The evil practices of the Israelites were in direct contrast to this. They oppressed the poor, were dishonest in their business practices, and even while observing the forms of worship they were not thinking of the Lord but inwardly planning evil. Such a life leads to spiritual destruction and death. In the Gospels the Lord tells us the same thing when He says of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:25) that they "make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess."

In the same chapter of Matthew the Lord calls the scribes and Pharisees "blind guides" and says to them, "Ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." This is a description of the time foretold in Amos 8:11, when the good would be spiritually

hungry and thirsty because they had no access to the Word of the Lord. Those who possessed and could read it and were supposed to teach it made it "of none effect through their tradition." Each of the successive churches ended in this way, and each time the Lord raised up among the remnant of good people a new church. We saw this at the end of the Most Ancient Church in the story of the flood and the preservation of Noah, and at the end of the Ancient Church in the story of the Tower of Babel and the call of Abram. The Prophets give us in much greater detail the account of the vastation of the ancient Jewish Church, which was followed by the Advent of the Lord. And the book of Revelation describes the decline of the first Christian Church, the final judgment, and the establishment of the New Jerusalem.

You young people, like Amos, have been given to see the vision of the basket of summer fruit. As you go out into the world, be on your guard against being drawn into the selfish and profane practices of the world, and keep your hearts pure and your minds open to hear the Word of the Lord.

Adult

After a brief statement concerning the Minor Prophets as a whole and Amos in particular, the class time may well be spent in discussing the means the Lord has given us for understanding all parts of the Word and the importance to us of learning to use those means. The chapter from Amos may be discussed as an example, and the teacher may find it helpful at some point to read the passage from AE 386¹¹ printed with this lesson. Too many New Church people today take their Scripture and their doctrines secondhand. Consequently much of the truth which is taken into their minds never becomes their own or does them any lasting good.

The twelve books from Hosea through Malachi, with which the Old Testament ends, are called the Minor Prophets. Most of us are not very familiar with them, although we all know a few verses from them by heart and we know at least part of the story of Jonah. Perhaps because the books are so short we do not easily identify them individually as we do the four Major Prophets. The

study of scholars has been principally devoted to the effort to place the twelve historically, and one rather widely held conclusion is that with the possible exception of Obadiah the order in our Bible, which is the order established by the Israelites, is chronologically substantially correct. Some of the books place themselves. Others are judged on the basis of their references to known historical or natural events. For the New Churchman, however, it is the inner message which is of interest and importance, and this message is timeless. The chapter we have chosen from Amos offers a good example of the problems connected with the study of the meaning of the Minor Prophets, as well as of the general tenor of their prophecies and the practical lessons they contain for us.

Amos is one of those who gives us in the letter some information about himself. In the first verse of the book he says that he was among the herdsmen of Tekoa and received his call to prophesy during the reign of Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam II of Israel. This places him as an early contemporary of Isaiah as well as of Hosea, and as an inhabitant of Judah, since Tekoa was a village about six miles south of Bethlehem, although the greater part of his message was directed against Israel. In verses 14 and 15 of the seventh chapter he tells us: "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit: and the Lord took me as I followed the flock." In the same chapter there is also a brief passage telling how Amaziah the priest of Bethel tried to discredit him with king Jeroboam. On the basis of these few statements a commercial film for the use of Sunday schools has been developed. While such films are no doubt prepared with the sincere intention of interesting children in the Bible, we should realize that, in common with most Bible story books as well as with the more pretentious religious movies which are shown in theaters, such films introduce so much purely imaginary material that the mind is completely confused as to what is actually in the Bible. We are sometimes so glad to see anything of a religious nature offered in the entertainment field that we may not stop to estimate whether its effect is actually good or bad. The Lord

Himself in His divine love and wisdom gave the Word. It does not need bolstering by our very limited understanding and imagination. The personal data given us in the letter are not there for the purpose of helping us construct a picture of the individual through whom the prophetic message was given, but, like all the rest of the book, for their spiritual meaning.

In His Second Coming the Lord gave us sufficient means for the study of the Word, so that with sincere effort we can receive some spiritual enlightenment even from the most obscure passages in the Prophets. An example of this is the vision recorded in the first verse of our chapter. The effort to find a meaning in this vision without the help of Swedenborg has been made. For example, a note on this verse in the *International Bible Commentary* reads: "summer fruit. i.e. fruit fully ripe, which soon rots; representing Israel as ripe for judgment: cp. Rev. 14:15, 18." This is perhaps as good and faithful an inference as the finite imagination could make from the verse in its letter. But in *Prophets and Psalms* Swedenborg summarizes the verse for us as follows: "A new thing of the church comes into existence," and relates the verse to the general topic, "A new church in place of the former." So we see that the vision has a good correspondence instead of a bad one, and although Swedenborg does not make any comment on the verse anywhere else, we can follow through with the help of the *Arcana*. From the story of Joseph and the dream of the chief baker we learn that a basket, as a container for food, represents the will or voluntary part. From the interpretation of the Lord's promise to Noah in Genesis 8:22 we learn that summer represents a state of charity. So we see the basket of summer fruit as picturing a new church in which the will would produce good works done in charity. The contrast between this true church and the state of the Israelitish Church as described in verses 4 to 6 makes clear why the end of that church was inevitable.

Throughout the Prophets, denunciations of evil are always accompanied sooner or later by promises of salvation for the good. These promises are not actually expressed by Amos until the latter

part of the ninth chapter, but the condition which necessitates the coming of a new church with salvation is described in verses 11 to 13 of chapter 8. We should compare these verses with some of the Lord's statements when He came into the world, notably Matthew 23:13, 16. Verse 11 of our chapter is one of those passages in which the spiritual sense appears clearly in the letter and so helps to enlighten the sincere Bible reader as to the meaning of many other passages, such as the Lord's statement to the woman of Samaria in John 4:14. We recall Swedenborg's statement that the Word is like a man clothed but with his face and hands bare.

There are many quotations from Amos 8 in the writings. For example, we learn from AC 3693 that in verse 9 "to cause the sun to go down at noon" denotes obscurity as to truth with those who are in the knowledges of good and truth," and from AC 4779 that in verse 10 "to bring up sackcloth upon all loins" signifies "mourning over destroyed goods." In several places, notably AE 386¹¹, verses 11 to 13 are interpreted, and AC 3923⁶ gives the meaning of verse 14.

The Prophets are not beyond our understanding if we are willing to study and avail ourselves of the means the Lord has provided. And we know that the states of heart and mind to which the Lord addresses His message in the Prophets are not only states of churches and of nations but of individuals—of any one of us at one time or another. We need to read and understand the Prophets as we do all other parts of the Word. Remembering that the neck is the link between the head and the body, through which all the nerves pass which connect the two, let us take to ourselves the Lord's rebuke (Jeremiah 7:25-26): "Unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers."

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 386¹¹: "A famine for bread is not meant, nor a

thirst for waters, but for hearing the word of Jehovah, thus that it is a lack of the knowledges of good and truth that is meant; and that these are not in the church or in its doctrine is described by the words, ‘they shall go from sea to sea, and from the north to the sunrise, seeking the word of Jehovah, and shall not find it,’ ‘from sea to sea’ signifying on every side, for the outmost boundaries in the spiritual world, where truths and goods begin and terminate appear like seas; consequently ‘seas’ in the Word signify the cognitions of truth and good, also knowledges [*scientifica*] in general; ‘from the north to the sunrise’ signifies also on every side where truth and good are, ‘the north’ meaning where truth is in obscurity, and ‘the sunrise’ where good is. Because ‘famine and thirst’ signify a lack of the knowledges of good and truth, therefore it is also said ‘in that day shall the beautiful virgins and the youths faint for thirst,’ ‘the beautiful virgins’ meaning the affections of truth from good, and ‘youths’ the truths themselves that are from good, ‘the thirst from which they shall faint’ meaning the lack of these.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. How many “Minor Prophets” are there? *twelve*
- J. Why are they called “Minor”? *short books*
- J. When did the earliest of them live? *about 800 B.C.*
- J. What is the period of the last three? *about 400 B.C.*
- P. Which one in the series is Amos? *third*
- J. When did he live? *time of Uzziah (about 800 B.C.)*
- J. Where was his home? *Tekoa*
- P. What was his occupation? *shepherd*
- J. To whom did he prophesy? *Israel (also Edom, Ammon, Moab)*
- P. With what vision does our chapter begin? *basket of fruit*
- P. What bad things were the Israelites doing? *cheating, stealing*
- J. What does the Lord say is to happen to them? *nation will end*
- I. Of what kind of hunger and thirst does verse 11 speak? *of hearing the Word*
- I. Which of the Blessings speaks of the same thing? *fourth*
- S. How can we satisfy this kind of hunger and thirst? *keep hearts pure, minds open to hear the Word*

JONAH AND THE GREAT FISH

Jonah 1; 2

Begin by giving the classes a brief outline of the background of the Minor Prophets. This can be done simply even with the Primaries. Then go to the particular position of Jonah, mentioning the difficulties which the unnecessary doubts of the miracle have caused. Do not dwell on this unless the class seems especially interested.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord allows hard experiences to come to us when we will learn in no other way.

It is not particularly important for us to know just when any prophet lived.

Doctrine is just another name for "teaching."

We should never despise anyone just because he is different from ourselves.

Notes for Parents

Most of us have heard people make fun of the story of Jonah. It is one of the stories in the Bible whose wonderful lessons have been hidden from many people by careless talk. Jonah was saved by a miracle no more remarkable than any other miracle in the Bible. "The Lord prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah." If we believe that God is the Creator of everything, we certainly should not question His power to create new forms and to govern and direct His creation.

Jonah was a prophet in the kingdom of Israel some seventy-five years before Israel was taken captive by Assyria, but even then Assyria was recognized as an enemy. It was quite natural that when the Lord told Jonah to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and tell the people there of their wickedness, Jonah did not want to obey. How often we are willing to do anything but the one thing

we know the Lord wants us to do! We run away from our duty just as Jonah did. The Lord put the story of Jonah in the Word to teach us that running away does no good. When we run away, nothing goes well for us. We cannot hide from the Lord and we cannot hide from ourselves. If we mean to be good people, sooner or later we shall have to bring our fault out into the open and look at it honestly and make up our minds to get rid of it. Then we have a period of struggle, which is pictured by Jonah's three days and nights in the belly of the fish. He says of himself, "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head." Doesn't this describe the way we feel sometimes when we are fighting some bad feeling deep in our hearts? But finally the Lord brought Jonah out of his trouble, and then Jonah thanked the Lord even for the trouble, because it had showed him his fault, and now he could do what the Lord wanted him to do.

Primary

The story is an easy one to tell and to talk about. Try to read the whole two chapters to the children. Then follow the notes and questions. Stress the fact that the Lord "prepared" a great fish.

Today we have a story about a prophet who did not want to do what the Lord told him to do. He ran away, imagining that the Lord would not follow him. Did you ever run and hide when you did not want to do what your mother told you to do? It didn't work very well, did it? Let us read from the Bible about Jonah and what happened to him. [Read both chapters.]

Some people do not believe this story is true.

But we should remember that it is no more wonderful than the rest of the miracles described in the Bible.

And we should remember that the Lord *prepared* the great fish to swallow up Jonah.

It was not just any great fish that happened to be swimming around at the time.

The Lord had work for Jonah to do, and made plans to take care of him.

The Lord knows our hearts so well that He is always ready for what we do.

Why was Jonah running away?

We sometimes try to run away from what we know we ought to do.

But there were good things about Jonah, too.

I wonder if you noticed something in the story which showed why the Lord could use Jonah as His prophet even though Jonah was not eager to obey. When Jonah found that his unwillingness was making trouble for other people, he admitted his fault and took the penalty himself rather than let others suffer. So, although he did go through a very frightening and unpleasant experience, the Lord could save him.

Another thing to notice is that when Jonah was inside the great fish and prayed to the Lord, he did not pray just to be saved, but instead he thanked the Lord for showing him his faults so that he could repent of them.

Jonah saw the lesson the Lord was teaching him and thanked the Lord for it, even when he did not know he was going to be saved.

Afterward Jonah obeyed the Lord and carried His message to Nineveh.

The people of Nineveh listened and repented.

So Jonah finally was the means of helping many people.

Junior

Have the class look up the Bible references, mentioning in connection with Matthew 12:40 the fact that the word "whale" which appears in some versions is a mistranslation. Impress the children with the importance given the book by the Lord Himself. Then show them how the story applies to their own experience.

Now we come to a story which almost everybody knows, the story of Jonah. We usually hear it referred to as "Jonah and the Whale," and we unfortunately sometimes hear people make fun of it. Scientists discovered long ago that the passage through the throat of the ordinary whale is much too small to admit of the whale's swallowing a man. But we should notice that the Bible does not say a *whale* but a *great fish*, and further it says: "the Lord had prepared a great fish." This is one of the miracles of the

the Bible, and it is not a bit more remarkable than any of the others. So we should not let people's questions about this simple fact lead our minds away from seeing the wonderful things the Lord is teaching us through the prophet Jonah.

Jonah was one of the twelve Minor Prophets, whose books are the last in the Old Testament. He is generally considered to have been the earliest of them, and his historical position is fairly well established by the reference to him in II Kings 14:25. He was one of the prophets of the kingdom of Israel, and we see from the statement in II Kings that he came from Gath-hepher, which was in the territory of Zebulun, and that he was given other messages from the Lord for the people of his nation and time—messages which were not among those chosen by the Lord to be recorded in the Word.

Where did the Lord tell Jonah to go with a prophecy?

Why was the Lord sending him?

Was Jonah willing to obey?

How did he try to escape?

Sometimes, when we are faced with a duty which we do not want to perform, we behave very much as Jonah did. We immediately decide that we have business elsewhere, or we become suddenly very active in some other way, or we "bury" ourselves in a book—anything to get out of doing the particular thing we know we ought to do. Usually we do not have very much better success in escaping than Jonah did.

What happened to his ship?

How did the sailors find out who was responsible?

Who suggested casting Jonah into the sea?

You can see from the story that Jonah really meant to be a good man, because when he found that his cowardice was endangering other people, he was willing to give up his life for their sakes. This was a virtue in him, but it is a virtue which is really not uncommon. People are often more willing to do some big, spectacular thing than to do their duty day by day. The sailors, too, were well-meaning men. They did their best to save themselves without sacrificing

Jonah even though he admitted he was to blame for their danger, and when they found it was really necessary to throw him into the sea, they prayed (to his God) to be forgiven.

But Jonah showed another and much greater virtue. Read carefully chapter 2.

Did Jonah pray to be saved from death?

No, in his prayer he expresses thanksgiving to the Lord for the experience through which he is passing, and the firm belief that even in his unhappy position the Lord is near and able to hear his prayer, and he pledges obedience to the Lord.

This was the reason why the Lord could save Jonah, and we can learn from it something that is very important to remember all our lives. Our troubles never come from the Lord. They are always the result either of our own shortcomings or of evils that have been allowed to go unchecked in the world around us. The Lord never lets troubles catch up with us that we cannot turn into blessings if we meet them in the right way. Our troubles should lead us first to look for our own faults and try to correct them; then they should lead us to turn to the Lord for guidance and help; and finally they should make us more sympathetic and helpful when other people are in trouble. We know that our muscles do not develop strength by always doing only easy things. Neither do our "spiritual muscles."

After Jonah was saved, he kept his vow of obedience and went to Nineveh and delivered the Lord's message there. We shall study the rest of his story next, where we will see the good which came to the people of Nineveh through Jonah's mission. This is referred to by the Lord Himself in Luke 11:29-32. And in Matthew 12:38-41 the Lord also cites Jonah's experience as a prophecy of His own death and resurrection. This makes us realize how careful we should be not to belittle or to make light of anything in the Word. There is nothing in the Word which does not have a deep meaning within it. Our constant effort should be to find and be led by that meaning.

Intermediate

The correspondence of the details of the story is the best lesson for this class. Other points may be brought in by the way.

In our Bible the books of the twelve Minor Prophets, the last twelve books of the Old Testament, are not exactly in the true historical order. Jonah, whose book comes fifth, is probably the earliest of all. We learn from II Kings 14:25 that he was prophesying at least as early as the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel. He was a prophet in Israel. We also learn from the same verse that he came from Gath-hepher, which was in the territory of Zebulun, and that he spoke other prophecies besides those recorded in the Word in the book of Jonah.

Jonah is undoubtedly the best known of the Minor Prophets. This is because his book, unlike the others, is a story and a very unusual one. You may hear people make fun of "Jonah and the Whale," even people who ought to know better. The saving of Jonah was a miracle no more wonderful than any of the other miracles in the Bible. The seventeenth verse of our first chapter says that "the Lord prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah." And the Lord Himself, when He was in the world, referred to this story as a fact (Matthew 12:40) and said that it was a prophecy of His own death and resurrection. The common idea that the great fish was a whale comes from this passage in the Gospel, but we should know that "whale" is a mistranslation of the Greek word.

Let us think first of this meaning of the book of Jonah with reference to the Lord's life on earth. We know that the Word came from the Lord and that its inmost meaning always concerns His life. He came, as He said, "to fulfil" the law and the prophets (Matthew 5:17). This means that when He was in the world, He lived out before the eyes of everybody all the things He had been saying about Himself in the Word from the beginning. Sometimes the inmost meaning comes out in the letter, as it does in this story of Jonah.

But the story has a meaning for our lives, too, and a very important one. What was the trouble with Jonah? He was a prophet of

the Lord and had probably spoken faithfully all the prophecies which the Lord had given him for his own people. But now the Lord had asked him to go to Nineveh with a message to another nation, the Assyrians, who were enemies of Israel, and he did not want to go. All through the Bible we see that the Jews of long ago despised the Gentiles. "Gentile" is merely a word used to describe people of another religion than one's own. To Jews Christians are Gentiles, as Mohammedans, Buddhists, and others are considered Gentiles by Christians. The Christian might just as truly consider a Jew a Gentile, although this is not customary. You remember how the Lord showed the Jews of that day in the parable of the Good Samaritan that they ought not to despise the Samaritans, who were Gentiles.

Jonah felt himself too good to be sent to Gentiles. We are like Jonah whenever we think we are too good or too old or too big to be asked to do any particular kind of useful work. Like Jonah, we may try to get out of doing some duty that is laid upon us. We may try to hide from our duty by becoming very busy about something else. Perhaps we make our lessons an excuse for not doing our chores around home, just as Jonah found that he had business which would take him in the opposite direction from Nineveh.

What happened to Jonah? The ship in which he had taken passage encountered a great storm and was in danger of being wrecked. Does this remind you of what often happens to us when we try to get out of doing what we know we ought to do? In the Word a ship is always a symbol of doctrine. Doctrine is not just something the minister talks about. It is any teaching or system of thought. The general ideas that we have chosen in order to determine what we shall do are doctrine. This is the "ship" in which we are riding the sea of our everyday thought and life. If our ideas are right, that is, if they are in harmony with the Lord's laws and plan, our ship will carry us safely—our sea will be calm. But when selfish ideas creep in, our ship runs into trouble. This is the storm. We do not always recognize that there is selfishness in our thoughts.

Jonah was asleep in the hold of the ship. But if we examine ourselves carefully with the Lord's help, which is pictured by the casting of lots, the lot will always fall on Jonah, and we shall have to bring him up into the light and find out just who he is and where he came from, and then throw him overboard.

Jonah really meant to be a good man. You notice it was he himself who told the sailors to save themselves by casting him into the sea. When he saw that his disobedience was making things hard for others, he preferred to pay the penalty himself. That was why the Lord could save him and use him finally to save the people of Nineveh. You should read the last two chapters of the book to get the end of the story, although we shall take it up next.

Now let us see just how Jonah was saved. We remember that water represents truth, or its opposite, falsity. The sea represents all the truths and falsities which we have gathered into our minds throughout our life. The living creatures in the sea, the fish, picture our affection for learning truth. So the Lord provided that Jonah should be saved by being swallowed by a great fish. If we at heart want to be good, to serve the Lord and the neighbor, we shall have the desire to learn from our experiences all that the Lord is trying to teach us through them. And this desire will stay with us until we have learned the lesson and are ready to obey. Read Jonah's prayer from the belly of the fish and notice that he was not asking to be saved from his predicament, but thanking the Lord for saving him from doing wrong. He was really thanking the Lord for the hard experience which had showed him his own selfishness and disobedience. This, too, is a lesson from the story of Jonah which we should take to heart. When we get into difficulties, we should not blame other people or the Lord for them. We should know that the Lord is letting them come to us to teach us a lesson we need and which we have refused to learn by any easier way. We should be grateful to our parents for punishing us when we do wrong. They do it only because they know that if they let us go on doing wrong, we shall be much unhappier later. The willingness to learn from our experiences is the great fish that saved Jonah

and let him go on doing the Lord's work.

Basic Correspondences

a ship = doctrine

the sea = knowledges gathered in the mind

a fish = an affection for learning truth

Senior

With this class it will be worthwhile to discuss at some length the fallacies involved in the criticism of the story of Jonah, because young people of this age can hardly have failed to be exposed to such criticism, and it is usually the first thing that comes to their minds when Jonah is mentioned. Then show them in every possible way what a remarkable and important book Jonah is.

Swedenborg says that the experience of Jonah "actually happened." Probably most people today would not believe this. In studying the book of Jonah it seems worthwhile to spend a little time on one small point of translation, because a mistranslation has contributed materially to the failure of many people to appreciate this book and get help from it. In the passage in the Gospels (Matthew 12:40) in which the Lord refers to the story of Jonah, the "great fish" of Jonah 1:17 is called by the translators [of KJV and RSV] a "whale." The Greek word used in this passage means exactly what the Hebrew word in Jonah means—any great fish or sea creature. But, doubtless because the Latinized form of the Greek word had come in later times to be applied to the genus of whales, the King James translators said "whale." This led to inquiry as to whether a whale really could swallow a man, and scientists said no. It apparently made no difference that the creature had not originally been called a whale or that it was said to have been "prepared" by the Lord, and so specifically placed in the category of miracles. With many, the story of Jonah was discredited and then ridiculed, and it is still discredited even by people who accept as facts many much more remarkable miracles found in the Word. And devout Bible readers, instead of pointing out the source of the difficulty, have unfortunately merely devoted themselves to

hunting the seas for a whale that really could have swallowed Jonah. So the world at large has gone on missing the point of the book of Jonah.

This is especially strange when the Lord Himself referred to it as a true story and called it a prophecy of His death and resurrection. Swedenborg explains in detail in *Apocalypse Explained*, n. 538¹¹ the prayer of Jonah from the fish's belly as it describes the Lord's combats with the hells, especially during the three-day period when His body lay in the tomb, although he says that the three days represent the fullness of his states of combat and victory throughout His life in the world.

Swedenborg also, in his summary explanation of the Prophets and Psalms, points out the application of the book of Jonah to the inner states of his times, especially the attitude of the ancient Jews toward Gentile nations, saying that they—who had the Word—were commanded to teach it to the nations round about, but would not. This is pictured by Jonah's unwillingness to take the Lord's message to Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, and his subsequent behavior when the people of Nineveh believed his message and repented. We shall study this part of the story next.

There are other lessons in the story of Jonah, however, which come nearer to our own daily experience. The first and most obvious one is that when Jonah tried to run away from the duty he found distasteful, he fell into difficulties. We have all done this same thing. With Jonah the commission he found displeasing was the command to carry the Lord's message to a Gentile nation, an enemy of his own people. We are sometimes made aware that we can in some way help a person we dislike or despise, perhaps someone who has injured us. Our first reaction is likely to be unwillingness and a tendency to argue ourselves out of a distasteful task. Jonah took ship for Tarshish and immediately went down into the hold of the ship and went to sleep. A ship always represents "doctrine," a system of ideas which has been developed and has become an attitude of mind. In this case we fall back on our accustomed way of thinking about the person in question and try to

close our ears to the call of duty. But the very presence of this selfish attitude in the mind is disturbing, and presently we find we have to acknowledge it and take it out and look at it honestly, just as the sailors woke Jonah up, brought him out of the hold, and then, after the lot fell on him, asked him who he was and where he came from.

If, like Jonah, we admit our fault and are willing to sacrifice our selfish feelings in the interest of the common good, the Lord can save us and bring us back and give us another chance. The great fish represents a genuine affection for the truth; this means an interest in finding out the truth for the sake of amending the life. We often need to ask: What was my real motive in turning my back on this duty? Do I really have this deep selfishness in me? Is it possible for the Lord to lead me out of such a depth? It is such searching questions as these which are reflected in Jonah's prayer from the belly of the great fish. The three days and three nights represent fullness of experience of alternating doubt and enlightenment. We notice that the last verse of Jonah's prayer is an expression of thanksgiving, not for the deliverance from his predicament—which he has not yet experienced—but for the suffering which has led him to see his fault and recognize the Lord's constant presence and power to save. And he pledged obedience for the future. Then he was returned to "dry land." His mental conflict had been resolved, and he was ready to go on with his life.

Jonah was probably the earliest historically of the twelve Minor Prophets. II Kings 14:25 tells us that he lived in the time of Jeroboam II of Israel, and that he was from Gath-hepher, a town in the territory of Zebulun. As this verse refers to another prophecy of his, we know that he was not raised up just for the mission to Nineveh, but was one of Israel's recognized prophets, who doubtless had given them many messages from the Lord. This knowledge forms a background against which his disobedience in the case of Nineveh stands out all the more strikingly.

Adult

The various levels of inner meaning in this story should interest the Adults. You will be able to tell by their first comments whether or not you need to spend time on the matter of mistranslation. If you do, put the emphasis on the importance of accurate translation of the Scripture. It is what the original text actually says that we should want to know, rather than what some person or group thinks it ought to say.

The book of Jonah is the fifth in the series of the twelve Minor Prophets, but historically Jonah is probably the first of them, for we are told in II Kings 14:25 that he lived in the time of Jeroboam II of Israel. Even so he was partly contemporary with Hosea, Amos, and Joel. He was from Gath-hepher, a town of Zebulun, and was a recognized prophet of Israel, but the particular story recorded in the book of Jonah is the only part of his message chosen by the Lord to make part of the Word.

In Matthew 12:38-41 the story of Jonah is cited by the Lord as a prophecy of His death and resurrection on the third day, and Swedenborg in AE 538¹¹ interprets the prayer of Jonan from the belly of the fish as a description of the Lord's combats with the hells and victory over them. So Jonah can be classed definitely with the Messianic prophecies.

The book has its historical application, and it is this which Swedenborg principally gives in his summary of it in the *Prophets and Psalms*. There he tells us that Jonah's call and his reception of it (Jonah 1:1-3) picture the fact that "those who were of the Jewish nation were commanded to teach the Word to the nations round about, but they would not, and thus they kept the Word among themselves alone." Some Bible students outside of the New Church have recognized national pride and antipathy as the primary cause of Jonah's original refusal to go to Nineveh and also of his later disappointment when Nineveh was spared. Unfortunately these students are inclined to laud Jonah's patriotism rather than to deplore his disobedience. Swedenborg says, however, that chapter 2 is a "prophecy concerning the Lord's combats with the hells, and concerning His most grievous temptations at that time, and

concerning His state at that time; the ‘three days and nights during which Jonah was in the bowels of the fish,’ signify the entire duration of the combat with the hells.”

Both of these interpretations of the book of Jonah—in the celestial sense and in the internal historical sense—help us to get some insight into the spiritual sense, the sense which describes our individual experience. From its meaning in the Lord’s life we see that it concerns deep temptations, and in its meaning with reference to the Hebrew nation we see that it has to do with our constant tendency to imagine that external piety excuses inner uncharitableness.

Jonah was obviously a prophet held in honor by his own people, since even Jeroboam II, who was an evil king, heeded his words. Jonah was in the habit of receiving the word of the Lord and speaking it boldly. But the Lord unerringly picked his weak spot and brought him down from his high place for his own good, at the same time using him for the salvation of the Ninevites and even of you and me, if we follow the example of the Ninevites (Luke 11:29-32). How often we are willing to do everything but the one thing the Lord requires of us, which is to recognize that we have no goodness of our own and to accept His guidance in love to Him and to the neighbor!

Jonah took ship in the opposite direction from Nineveh. He “bought” a philosophy of life—a ship represents doctrine—which he thought would save him from the necessity of doing what he did not want to do. Then he immediately went down into the hold and went to sleep. This reminds us of Isaiah’s description of the fast acceptable to the Lord (Isaiah 58:3-7) which ends: “... and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh.” How often we hide in excuses instead of facing ourselves squarely! Then the storm rises. We are not at ease. Everything goes wrong. What is the trouble? Casting lots always pictures submitting our lives to the judgment of the Lord’s truth. The lot falls on Jonah, on the hidden fault. It must be brought out and examined and put out of our hearts before we can be at peace.

Jonah goes down into the depths in an effort to see and accept

truth about himself—a state pictured by the great fish—for three days and three nights, a full state of spiritual combat. And by this process he is brought to a realization of his own weakness and of the Lord's goodness to him, of the divine providence which has directed his whole experience, to thanksgiving to the Lord for the lesson learned, and to the determination to be wholly obedient. Then he is cast out upon the dry ground. This is our experience whenever we are brought to see, acknowledge and repent of some deep fault in ourselves.

In the *Spiritual Diary*, Swedenborg says that Jonah's experience "actually happened" (see below). There is no more reason to question the miracle performed in Jonah's case than there is to question any of the miracles of the Word. Doubt of the miracles rests on a fundamental unwillingness to believe that there is anything superior to nature, that God is not a mere name but is the ever-present and ever-active creator, an unwillingness to believe that He creates new forms and controls the events of our lives. Such an unwillingness seizes upon every excuse to doubt and discredit the supernatural phenomena presented in the Word. The story of Jonah has been an especial target.

This is in part due to the use of the word "whale" in the King James translation of Matthew 12:40, a mistranslation which was carried over unchanged in the Revised Standard Version.* The Greek word, like the Hebrew word in Jonah 1:17, means any large fish or sea creature. It was used, for example, in the *Odyssey* to mean a seal or sea-calf. It did not take on the meaning of *whale* in the Greek, but later, after it had passed over into the Latin, it was adopted by science as the generic term for the whale family. Accurate translation is always essential to the study of the spiritual sense of the Word, and the history of the world's reception of the book of Jonah shows that it may also be very important for those who know nothing of the spiritual sense. Men are still trying to

*The New English and the Jerusalem Bibles translate it "sea-monster." Phillips has "great fish"; and Today's English Version, "big fish." —Ed.

decide the question of whether a whale could or could not have swallowed Jonah, and in the process the message of the book is completely lost sight of. It is a modern case of making the Word of God "of none effect" by our tradition. We need to study the real meaning and application of the Book of Jonah not only for our own help, but that we may present it to others in such a way as to lift it to its proper level again, above the possibility of discredit by careless critics.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Spiritual Diary, n. 1391: "*That representations in the other life are actual in the world. Moreover, similar [things] exist also in the world, for all those things actually exist upon earth; so that it cannot but be that they signify [spiritual things], as that Jonah was swallowed by a whale, which actually happened in the world; as also did the miracles of Egypt, and many other [things] called miracles.*" [This was written in March 1748, the year before Volume 1 of the *Arcana* was published. —Ed.]

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Which one of the Minor Prophets are we studying today? *Jonah (fifth)*
- J. When and where did Jonah prophesy? *Israel, in time of Jeroboam II*
- J. Where do we find this information? *II Kings 14:25*
- J. What did the Lord tell Jonah to do? *go and prophesy to Nineveh*
- J. Where was Nineveh? *capital of Assyria*
- J. Why did Jonah not want to obey? *too proud*
- J. How did he try to avoid obeying? *took a ship in the opposite direction*
- P. What happened to the ship? *endangered by storm*
- P. How did the sailors find out who was to blame? *cast lots*
- P. What did Jonah tell them to do with him? *throw him overboard*
- P. What happened when they cast him into the sea? *it became calm*
- P. How long was Jonah in the fish's belly? *three days*
- J. What kind of prayer did he make? *thanks*
- J. What did he promise? *to obey God*
- J. Do you know what he did after he was returned to land? *went to Nineveh*
- I. What does this story teach us? *(1) not to run away from duty, (2) not to blame others for our troubles*
- S. What did the Lord say it pictured? *His death and resurrection*

JONAH AND THE GOURD

Jonah 3; 4

The lesson for today cannot be taught without first being sure that the class knows and understands the first part of the story, that of Jonah and the great fish. The teachers should therefore review the first two chapters of Jonah and also read the summary given in the Junior notes, which answers questions commonly raised concerning the story of Jonah. New Church people should have a clear understanding of this story because it is so often questioned and even ridiculed.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord's love for men is greater than any love of ours.

We should not go to the Word to find confirmation of our own ideas.

One of the greatest hindrances to the development of faith is self-love.

True charity rejoices when an evil person repents and is spared from punishment.

Notes for Parents

People often make fun of the story of Jonah and the "whale." This is a great pity. As a part of the Word of God it is given to teach us important lessons which we need to know, and when we make fun of it, we deprive ourselves of help which the Lord is trying to give us. This is one of the ways of breaking the commandment: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." We should know, too, that the Bible does not say it was a whale that swallowed Jonah. The book of Jonah itself even in the English says that "the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah." And although the word "whale" is used in the traditional English translations of Matthew 12:40, this is a mistranslation of the Greek

word which, like the Hebrew word, means "a great fish." This was one of the Lord's miracles—no more and no less remarkable than any other—and the Lord Himself while He was on earth spoke of it as true, and showed that it was a prophecy of what His own experience in the world was to be. Read also Luke 11:29-32. The Lord's use of the story should lead us to believe in it and to reverence it.

Strangely enough, the lesson of this story applies to the very people who ridicule it, for it points out the folly and wickedness of belief in our own wisdom and of the feeling of superiority to others. Making fun of something one doesn't understand is one of the evidences of this evil. Jonah was proud of himself as the Lord's prophet and as one of the "chosen people" who had the Scriptures. Like most of his countrymen, he despised all who were not like himself. When the Lord first told him to go and prophesy to the people of Nineveh, the great capital of the Assyrians, he tried to get out of obeying. And even after his experience with the great fish had taught him that he must obey, his heart was not changed. He went to Nineveh in the hope of seeing it destroyed, and when it was spared by the Lord, he was angry.

When we despise and dislike a person, we often would rather see him suffer in some way than make an effort to instruct and help him. This is not a Christian attitude. The Lord loves us all alike, and is always trying to lead us to a better life. He never permits punishment to come to anyone unless he will learn in no other way. On the cross He prayed for those who had crucified Him: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." When we draw back from other people and shut ourselves up with our own self-satisfaction, we are like Jonah going outside the city and making himself a booth to sit in. And our enjoyment of our exaggerated ideas of our own wisdom and importance, like the gourd which grew up to shade Jonah, will soon be destroyed by our own suspicions and disagreeable thoughts. It is only by forgetting ourselves and trying to make others happy that we can find any lasting happiness ourselves.

Primary

First tell the children in simple terms the whole story of the first three chapters. Then read them chapter 4 and draw from it the lesson that we should never want to see people suffer even if we do not like them. The moral lesson is the wrongness of Jonah's attitude toward the Ninevites, and the Lord's love for all people.

Way back in the days of the kings of Israel there lived a prophet whose name was Jonah. A prophet is one who speaks for the Lord. Jonah had been giving the Lord's message faithfully to the kings of Israel for some time when one day the Lord gave him a command which he did not want to obey. The Lord told him to go to the great city of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and rebuke the people there for their sins. But Jonah, like most of his countrymen, despised anyone who was not an Israelite; so he did not want to go to Nineveh. He tried to run away and hide from the Lord. Do you ever try to run away and hide when your mother wants you to do something you don't want to do?

Do you remember what happened to the ship in which he sailed?

What happened to Jonah?

How did the Lord save him?

Then Jonah was ready to take the Lord's message to Nineveh.

The people of Nineveh had never had a prophet from the Lord before to tell them what was right.

They listened to Jonah and believed him and repented of their sins.

So the Lord forgave them and did not destroy the city as Jonah had foretold.

You would think that Jonah would have been pleased at this, wouldn't you? But you see, Jonah did not like the people of Nineveh and he wanted to see them punished. Did you ever feel this way about some child you didn't like, and wish the teacher would punish him?

Where did Jonah go to see what would happen?

What grew up to give him shade?

Then what happened to the gourd?

How did the Lord use this to teach Jonah how wrong his feeling had been?

Junior

The Juniors will probably remember most of the first part of the Jonah story. Find out how much they know and be sure their knowledge is accurate; this is particularly important in the case of a story so frequently misrepresented. Have the children look up the Bible references in their notes, and be sure they understand the major implications in each case. The final lesson of our chapters is obvious and simple.

How many Minor Prophets are there?
Which are the first and the last of them?
Where do the Minor Prophets come in the Bible?

In our Bibles the book of Jonah is the fifth of the Minor Prophets. But these books are not arranged exactly in the order in which the men lived. Jonah was probably the first of them all. Look up II Kings 14:25. He was the first prophet whose name we know after Elisha. And we also learn from this verse in II Kings that he had prophesied to his own people in Israel for a long enough time to be recognized by the king as the Lord's prophet. But his prophecies to his own people were not recorded for us in the Word. We know that everything which the Lord chose to have recorded in the Word contains a message for people in all times; so we must remember that, although the book of Jonah seems to be just a story about Jonah, it really has within it prophecies of things to come and deep lessons for us all. You will not study these until you are older, but you may form some idea about them by reading Matthew 12:38-41 and Luke 11:29-32.

Many people know the book of Jonah just as the story of Jonah and the "whale," and have never really read it carefully or learned anything about the last two chapters, which are our lesson for today. In our lesson on the first two chapters we found that it was not a whale at all, but a "great fish" prepared by the Lord to swallow Jonah. In some versions of Matthew it is called a whale, but that is an incorrect translation of the Greek word, which really means a "great fish." We need to know this, and also to know the story of the first two chapters, and, as you may not remember it clearly, we will just go over its main points.

Jonah was commanded by the Lord to go to Nineveh and "cry against it," that is, to rebuke the people of Nineveh for their sins. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, and the ancient Jews despised and hated the Assyrians; so Jonah did not want to go there. He thought he could flee from the presence of the Lord by boarding a ship to Tarshish, a distant port on the Mediterranean. But the Lord sent a great storm, and when the sailors cast lots to see for whose fault the storm was sent, the lot fell on Jonah, and he agreed to be thrown into the sea to save the rest. He did not drown, however, because the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow him. He remained in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, and in that time he came to acknowledge his sin and that he ought not to oppose his will to the Lord's, and he thanked the Lord for teaching him this lesson and promised to obey Him. Then he was cast out on the shore, the Lord's command came to him the second time, and he went to Nineveh.

Nineveh was a very old and very famous city. It is mentioned as far back in the Bible as Genesis 10:11, and you remember that that is part of the Ancient Word. It was also a very great city. The ruins which have been uncovered show that it was sixty miles in circumference. So we can understand that Jonah may easily have walked "a day's journey" before getting to the heart of the city.

What did Jonah tell the people of Nineveh?
Did the people of Nineveh believe him?
What did the king do?
What did he command the people to do?
What did the Lord do for Nineveh?
Was Jonah pleased that Nineveh was spared?

Jonah had learned that he must obey the Lord, but his feelings toward the people of Nineveh had not changed. He evidently had been looking forward to seeing this great enemy city destroyed, and he also felt that after all he had gone through, his prophecy should certainly have been fulfilled. We sometimes allow ourselves to feel that we should like to see certain bad people punished, but this story of Jonah shows us that this is not the way we ought to feel.

Where did Jonah go to see what would happen?
What did the Lord cause to grow to give him shade?
What came to destroy the gourd?
How did Jonah feel about it?
Then what did the Lord tell him?

The Lord loves all of us. When we are bad, His only desire is to bring us to a better state of mind so that He can make us happy. Sometimes He has to let punishment come to us when we will not learn in any other way, but He takes no pleasure in our suffering. Perhaps you remember that when the Lord was being crucified, He prayed for the people who had condemned Him saying, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." This is our example. Read Ezekiel 18:23.

Intermediate

Young people often have "naturally" the feelings represented by Jonah's attitude in our story. This is our best opportunity to show them how unworthy and dangerous these feelings are, and to try to lead them into a more Christian attitude toward people they dislike.

Our lesson for today is again about the only one of the Minor Prophets who is at all familiar to most people. This is partly because in the letter the book of Jonah is a story, and partly unfortunately because the story has been so generally disbelieved and so often ridiculed. We have had a lesson on the first two chapters of Jonah and you may remember that much of the disbelief stems from the assumption—based on a mistranslation of the original Greek of Matthew 12:40—that the great fish which is said to have swallowed Jonah was a whale, and the scientific fact that no whale's throat would permit the passage of a human body. If we keep in mind that both in the Hebrew and in the Greek the word merely indicates a great fish or sea creature, and that the book of Jonah says "the Lord prepared a great fish," we shall see that this is a miracle no more difficult to accept than any other, and we shall be able to speak up in answer to any ridicule of the story which

we may hear, and so perhaps do some good. Swedenborg says in his *Spiritual Diary* 1391 that the story of Jonah is true.

In our Bible the Minor Prophets are not placed in exact historical order. They do not all indicate just when and where they were written, but Jonah was probably among the first. From the reference to him in II Kings 14:25 we learn that he is the first prophet mentioned by name after the death of Elisha, that he prophesied in Israel, and that he was recognized by the king of that time as the Lord's prophet. We learn also that he spoke other prophecies besides that of which the book of Jonah treats. He was the Lord's faithful prophet to his own people. But when he was given a message for the people of Nineveh, he did not want to deliver it. And it was this part of his life which the Lord chose to have recorded in the Word. The whole book of Jonah is a prophecy, meant not for the ancient Hebrews or for the people of Nineveh alone, but for us and for people of all time. In Matthew 12:39-41 the Lord Himself tells us that the experience of Jonah with the great fish was prophetic of His own three days in the tomb after His crucifixion, and in Luke 11:29-32 He refers to the two chapters which we have for today as a rebuke to those to whom He was preaching.

Many people who know about Jonah and the great fish do not know the rest of the story. Jonah's experience taught him that he must not set up his will against the Lord's, and while in the belly of the fish he promised obedience. So when, after he was cast out on the shore, the command of the Lord came to him the second time to go to Nineveh and preach the Lord's message there, he went. But his dislike of the Assyrian Gentiles, which had prompted his original flight, was unchanged, as we learn from the letter of the story. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, was indeed a great city. It was very old, going back to the time of the Ancient Church (Genesis 10:11), and archaeological excavations of its ruins show it to have been sixty miles in circumference; so Jonah may well have walked a day's journey in it before reaching its center.

We remember that Assyria represents the reasoning plane of the mind, and Swedenborg tells us that Nineveh represents "falsities

from the fallacies of the senses in the obscurity of an unenlightened understanding and from ignorance." (AC 1188) He tells us that Jonah was sent to enlighten the people of Nineveh because at that time only the Israelites had the Word; and because the people of Nineveh had sinned from ignorance and repented when they were told the truth, the Lord could pardon and spare them. All through the Bible we have this same lesson, that wrong done from ignorance, while it has its inevitable effects, does not injure our souls, whereas wrong done when we know better does injure them.

Jonah was angry when the people of Nineveh were spared. He felt that all his hard experiences had been vain or useless. This was partly because he was thinking of his own reputation as a prophet, and partly because he had hoped to see Nineveh destroyed—both unworthy feelings. There is a lesson for us here because we are sometimes tempted by the same feelings. When we see someone doing wrong—especially someone whom we dislike—we are tempted to hope that we shall see him punished and be able to say, "I told you so." The fourth chapter of Jonah shows us just how unworthy of a Christian these feelings are.

Jonah went out of the city and made himself a booth to sit in while he watched to see what would happen. So we sometimes draw away from the person we have condemned and from the safety of our own self-satisfaction watch to see what will happen to him. The gourd which grew up to shade Jonah represents the evil state of pride in which he was—his sense of superiority and his unfriendliness. (It is now generally thought that the "gourd" was probably the castor oil plant, which even with slight handling may wilt and wither. —*Ed.*) The worm which destroyed the gourd represents falsity from evil. The selfish man never feels secure for a long time. He imagines all kinds of bad intentions in other people which may be threatening him, and lets his imagination destroy his comfort like the vehement east wind, and his resentment burns like the sun which beat upon Jonah's head. His thought is all for himself and his own safety and importance. The Lord's words to Jonah in the last verse of the chapter teach us how opposite such

feelings are to the Lord's love, which longs to save and bless everyone.

Basic Correspondences

Nineveh = falsities from the fallacies of the
 senses with those in ignorance

the gourd = the evil in which Jonah was

the worm = falsity from evil

Senior

Young people are apt to be more democratic in their daily relations with those of their own age than are older people who have grown into a fixed pattern of life. But young people are by no means free from the temptation to self-satisfaction and intolerance. The subtlety of the working of this selfish love in the heart, and the false ideas and attitudes which it develops in the mind should be stressed.

In our Bibles the book of Jonah is the fifth of the books called the Minor Prophets, but this does not mean that he was the fifth historically. In II Kings 14:25 Jonah is referred to as the Lord's prophet in Israel. This places him shortly after the death of Elisha and makes him probably the first of the twelve.

It is strange that so many Christians disbelieve and even ridicule the story of Jonah, for the Lord Himself teaches that Jonah's experience was a prophecy of His own rejection and of His three days in the tomb after His crucifixion (Matthew 12:38-41; Luke 11:29-32). For us in the New Church there is the further assurance of Swedenborg, who says that Jonah's story is true. In our lesson on the first two chapters of the book we learned that much of the disbelief in this particular miracle stems from the use of the word *whale* in Matthew, which is a mistranslation of the Greek. The word used both in the Greek and in the Hebrew means merely a "great fish," and we are told that the Lord had "prepared" the great fish.

Our lesson for today is on the last part of the story of Jonah, which is not so well known as the first two chapters. Jonah's

original flight from the presence of the Lord was caused by his unwillingness to take the Lord's message to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Over and over again in both the Old and the New Testaments we are told how prone the ancient Hebrews were to despise all Gentiles. Swedenborg tells us (AE 401³⁶) that "Jonah was of that nation, and therefore was sent to Nineveh; for the Jewish nation had the Word, and were therefore able to teach those who were outside of the church, and who are called Gentiles; these are signified by 'Nineveh.' Because the Jewish nation was, above others, in the love of self and in falsities from that love, they wished well to none but themselves, thus not to the Gentiles, but these they hated. Because the character of that nation was such, and Jonah represented it, he was very angry that Jehovah should spare Nineveh." Jonah's experience with the great fish had made him obedient, but it had not changed his heart.

The temptation pictured in the story is one which is by no means characteristic of the Israelite nation alone, but is common to us all in one form or another; so the story is recorded for us as part of the Word, whereas Jonah's prophecies to his own people were not recorded. We all have a natural tendency to feel ourselves superior to those who differ from us. Our own race, our own education, our own knowledge, our own type of mind, our own idea of how things should be done—even our own taste in literature, in art, in music, in dress, in food—is, we assume, necessarily superior, and we tend to despise in one degree or another anyone who disagrees—who is "different." The Lord directed many of His parables and teachings against this attitude, and there is nothing more severely condemned in the writings than this sin of arrogance and superiority.

The story of Jonah and the gourd is one of the Lord's ways of bringing to our attention this deep-seated evil in us and showing us how contrary it is to the principles which, as Christians, we should be practicing. Jonah's withdrawal outside the city of Nineveh to "see what would become of the city" pictures our tendency to stand aloof from people we consider inferior to ourselves and

observe them as mere curiosities. The booth he made for his shelter pictures our self-satisfaction. The gourd which grew up so rapidly to give him shade is the evil of arrogance which seems at first to give us pleasure and satisfaction. But this very sense of superiority breeds false ideas of everything. We begin to believe that nothing is good which does not minister to our pride in ourselves. We mis-judge the thoughts and intentions of others and imagine all sorts of affronts and threats to our dignity where none exist, as Jonah, loving his position as a prophet, felt that the Lord had made light of it, and so he wanted to die. These false ideas are the "worm" which destroyed the gourd and left Jonah exposed to the burning "sun" of his self-love.

The Lord's lesson taught in the last two verses of the book is clear. Jonah had thought only of himself and of worldly honor, which passes away "in a night," as all earthly things do. The Lord's concern is with the souls of all men, good and bad alike. He loves each one, regardless of his worldly position, education, wealth, or even his knowledge of the truth or his correctness of life. He wants us all to be happy, and permits punishment to fall on us only when we will learn in no other way the things in us which are leading to unhappiness. In Ezekiel 18:23 He says: "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?" If we are to be true followers of the Lord, we should recognize and fight in ourselves all tendency to set ourselves above others. We should keep in mind always the Lord's words to His disciples (Matthew 20:25-28): "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Adult

With this class the passages quoted from the writings as well as those quoted from the Word might be taken up and discussed one at a time. The powerful lesson presented by the story of Jonah should make us realize the importance of trying to correct the world's false estimate of it.

The prophet Jonah lived in the kingdom of Israel in the time of the second Jeroboam, not long after the death of Elisha. We learn this from II Kings 14:25. It is evident that he was recognized by the king as the Lord's prophet, for the prophecy mentioned in that verse is not a part of the book of Jonah. We see from this that it was not Jonah's prophecies to his own people which the Lord chose to have recorded. The book of Jonah differs from those of the other Minor Prophets in that it is a story about Jonah rather than an obvious prophecy or series of prophecies. Yet the whole story is prophetic and its importance is evidenced by the Lord's own references to it in Matthew 12:38-41 and Luke 11:20-32.

It is strange that in view of the Lord's own witness to the truth of the story, so many Christians who do not question other miracles have been induced to discard it as impossible. In our lesson on the first two chapters, we called attention to the fact that the word *whale* in Matthew 12:40 is a mistranslation—one which was not corrected in the Revised Standard Version.* The Greek word in Matthew as well as the Hebrew word in Jonah meant, at the time when it was used, any great fish or sea creature. It was at a much later date that its Latinized form came to be restricted to apply to the whale family only. Swedenborg says in the *Diary* that the story of Jonah is factual. We should all have this information in mind and not be silent when we meet with disbelief in the story and especially with ridicule of it.

For the story of Jonah contains very important lessons. In AC 8481 Swedenborg says: "The falsity of evil which is in the good that is from our own, is compared to 'a worm' . . . for falsity also gnaws and thus torments. There are two things which make hell,

*It has, however, been corrected in several more recent versions. —Ed.

as there are two which make heaven . . . the two which make hell are evil and falsity . . . The torment in hell from the falsity is compared to ‘a worm’; and the torment from evil there is compared to ‘fire.’” See Isaiah 66:24 and Mark 9:43-44. We recall that Assyria, of which Nineveh was the capital, represents the reasoning plane of the mind, and we are told in AC 1188: “That ‘Nineveh’ signifies falsities from the fallacies of the senses in the obscurity of an unenlightened understanding, and from ignorance, is evident in Jonah, who was sent to Nineveh, which city was pardoned because they were such.” We might note that by this definition many of the people who disbelieve the story of Jonah today are “Ninevites,” who would really change their opinion if the truth were told them.

This outline from the writings points to a very common temptation which few of us escape—the temptation to set ourselves up as the pattern which everyone should follow and to condemn and disparage anyone who does not conform to our pattern. That this is a very serious evil is impressed upon us by Swedenborg in many places, as for example in AC 4949 where he speaks of some in the spiritual world “who have abodes under the soles of the feet” and who are constantly in the endeavor to ascend but always falling back. He says of these: “I was told that such are they who have despised others in comparison with themselves . . . They are in a kind of stupidity; for such arrogance extinguishes and suffocates the light of heaven, and consequently intelligence.” Jonah delivered the Lord’s message to Nineveh, threatening it with destruction, but in his heart he was glorying in his own superiority to the Ninevites and looking forward to their discomfiture. He was thinking of his own importance as the Lord’s prophet. When we are in this state of mind, we cannot be happy for any length of time, because we are always looking for things to criticize in those we despise and constantly being offended through our own false estimate of what they say and do. We miss all the true joy which comes from seeing and appreciating their good qualities. Our “worm dieth not.” The tendency to think of ourselves as superior to others is one of our most subtle and deadly foes.

The Lord set us the example of humility and perfect love. We should take to heart His words in Matthew 20:25-28. He Himself, who was greatest of all, was the servant of all. On the cross He prayed for those who had crucified Him: "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do." He has no pleasure in anyone's discomfiture, but only in leading each one, by whatever means is most likely to succeed, into the way of happiness and peace. He bade the disciples be "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." This same lesson is brought out clearly in Ezekiel 18:20-24. As we learned in the case of David and Solomon, none of us ever reaches the point at which he is so wise and so great that he can think nothing false or do no wrong. In self-satisfaction lies concealed the "worm" of destruction.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 401³⁶: "This evil in that nation is signified by the gourd which the worm smote so that it withered. 'The sun that beat upon the head of Jonah' signifies the love of self which prevailed in that nation; and 'the scorching east wind' falsity therefrom; and 'the worm that smote the gourd' signifies the destruction of this evil and its falsity."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

P. Is the book of Jonah one of the Major or one of the Minor Prophets?

Minor

J. When and where did Jonah live? *shortly after Elisha, in Israel*

J. Why did he try to run away from the Lord? *too proud to warn Nineveh*

P. What happened to him? *thrown overboard, swallowed by great fish*

J. Where was Nineveh? *Assyria*

J. When Jonah went to Nineveh, what did he tell the people? *forty days till doom*

J. Why did his prophecy not come true? *the people repented*

P. Was Jonah pleased? *no*

P. Where did he go? *edge of town*

P. What grew up to give him shade? *"gourd"*

P. What came to destroy the gourd? *worm*

P. Was Jonah angry? *yes*

- J. What did the Lord tell him? *he should have as great pity for people*
- I. What does the gourd represent? *arrogant pride, sense of superiority*
- S. What does the worm represent? *false ideas associated with pride*
- S. Do people today ever behave as Jonah did? Explain. *yes, every time we feel our ways and our ideas must be better than those of anyone who is "different"*

THE PROPHET MICAH

Micah 6

This again is one of the survey lessons. Be sure all the children learn what is meant by the "Minor Prophets," and why they were called "Minor." Read Micah 6:8 and comment on its meaning with all classes.

Doctrinal Points

Charity is the essential of a good life, but outward good works are only the first step toward charity. Outward good works are not charity.

Notes for Parents

The last twelve books of the Old Testament are called the Minor Prophets. They are so much shorter than the other books that all twelve used to be written on one scroll. In Old Testament times books were not like our books, but were long pieces of parchment which could be rolled up on round pieces of wood. Jews today still keep the Torah, or Law, on such a scroll in their synagogues in a shallow, curtained chamber which they call the "ark." The chamber occupies the same place which the altar and Bible occupy in our churches, as the focus of vision for the congregation.

The books of the Minor Prophets in our Bible are not in exact historical order. Jonah is thought to have been the earliest. Hosea, Amos, and Jonah prophesied in Israel. The last three, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, prophesied after the return from captivity. The others were all prophets of Judah. Some of them tell us in what period they prophesied; a few do not, and their dates cannot be certainly placed.

Many people are not very familiar with the books of the Minor Prophets. While everyone feels in them the same strange power which is felt throughout the Word because it is really the Lord

who is speaking to us in it, there is little narrative in them to fix them in our minds, and they often seem disconnected and obscure. But we should read them just the same, for the Lord knows what we need better than we do, and we are told that as we read any part of the Word, guardian angels are present with us as we read, sensing the inner meaning, and so the Lord can help us through even the parts we do not understand at all. And often, as in our chapter for today, we come upon a verse which has a clear, direct meaning for every one of us.

The prophet Micah tells us (Micah 1:1) that he lived in Judah in the time of three of its kings, the best known of whom was Hezekiah. Like all the prophets, he was sent by the Lord to point out to the people the sins they were committing, to warn them what the result would inevitably be if they continued in the same ways, and to show them the path the Lord wanted them to follow. The prophets were not popular. In our chapter Micah points out clearly the injustice, violence, and deceit of the people, and begs them to return to obedience to their God, who has done so much for them. He tells them that they cannot make up for the evil of their deeds by sacrifices and offerings to the Lord, no matter how great these may be. There have been men in our own country who have thought that they could be as hard and unjust in their dealings as they liked in order to make money, provided that after they made it they gave part of it to the church or to some great charity.

Micah is speaking to us as well as to the people of his day when he says that it is our daily dealings with our fellow men which count in the Lord's sight and our daily attitude toward the Lord and His teachings by which we are finally judged. The verse which we should ask the children to learn is one which we should all know and say to ourselves often: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

Primary

Try to teach Micah 6:8 to the children and explain simply what it means,

especially by illustrating its opposite from their own experience. Do they ever try to claim credit to themselves for what someone else has done or put the blame for their own naughtiness on someone else? Do they ever get angry with others and try to make them suffer? Do they ever want their own way even when they know it is wrong? These children should also hear again the names of the twelve Minor Prophets and learn where to find them in the Bible. The learning and explanation of the three rules should be the basis for most of the lesson.

At the end of the Old Testament there are twelve short books called the Minor Prophets.

Let us open our Bibles and read their names.

Some of these Minor Prophets lived in Judah and some in Israel.

The last three prophesied after the people returned from captivity.

Each has his special message, but they all rebuked the people for their sins.

The ancient Hebrews did not have the kind of books we have. Their books were all written by hand on very long pieces of parchment or skin. A round stick was fastened to each end. Then, as it was read, the "book" was unrolled from one stick and rolled up on the other. The twelve books of the Minor Prophets were so short that they could all be written on one scroll.

Our lesson for today is from the book of the prophet Micah. He lived in the kingdom of Judah and prophesied during the reigns of three kings, the greatest of whom was Hezekiah. The Lord always sent His prophets to tell the people when they were doing wrong and to warn them of what would happen if they went on doing it, and to urge them to change their ways and do right. The Lord had done many wonderful things for the people and He had a right to expect them to obey Him. When your parents find fault with you for being naughty, you should remember how much they are doing for you all the time and that you owe them loving obedience.

Let us read Micah 6:1-12. As we read, see if you can pick out some of the good things the Lord had done for the people and some of the bad things they were doing.

Through Micah the Lord is speaking to us also.

Are we ever really happy when we are doing what we know is wrong?

"To do justly" means always to be fair and honest in little things as well as in big ones.

"To love mercy" means always to be kind and forgiving and helpful and never to want to hurt anyone.

"To walk humbly with thy God" means to read our Bibles regularly, to go to church and Sunday school, and to try always to do what will please the Lord rather than just what will please ourselves.

Junior

The historical background can be taken up in this class and the various Bible references studied. Have the children memorize verse 8, and discuss each of the three rules separately. Point out how much happier the world would be if everyone obeyed them.

For our lesson today we have chosen the prophet Micah, because in our chapter he gives us in one verse which we can easily learn by heart a clear and simple statement of the requirements of a good life. Micah, as he tells us in the first verse of his book, lived in Judah in the days of the kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. This was the same time in which Isaiah lived. Micah points out some of the particular sins of the people of that time.

What ones can you find mentioned in our chapter?

What does Micah say will be the punishment for these sins?

Now read verses 6 to 8. People today do not actually sacrifice animals or bring meal and oil to the church as offerings, or sacrifice their children to obtain salvation for themselves. Yet we are not so different after all from the people of Micah's time. We do like to do as we please most of the time and then imagine we make up for it by going to church on Sunday and putting something in the collection plate and perhaps giving something to charity once in a while and being very generous to someone now and then.

The Lord tells us through Micah that the good life does not consist in doing something spectacular occasionally, but in a certain quality of daily living. As in everything else, there are three planes of our lives concerned in goodness. They are will, thought, and act. In our acts we must "do justly." That is, we must be honest and fair in little things as well as in big ones. We must not be always trying to get the better of someone else or to get something for

nothing. Then in our thoughts we must "love mercy." That is, we must be kind and forgiving, not holding grudges or trying to pay people back when they injure us, but always ready to help others. Finally, and most important of all, in our hearts we must "walk humbly" with God. That is, we must recognize that we are often wrong and weak and that we need to learn all we can about the Lord and what He teaches us in the Word, and to make the Lord's ways our ways, instead of trying to prove that what we happen to want to do is what ought to be done.

More than seven hundred years after the time of Micah the Lord found the same faults with the scribes and Pharisees which Micah had found in their ancestors. And the Lord gave them the same rules for a good life. Read Matthew 23:23.

One more thing we must learn about the book of Micah. Read verse 2 of chapter 5. Does this sound familiar? Now read Matthew 2:1-6. The Old Testament and the New Testament are bound together even in the letter by so many such prophecies and fulfillments that they cannot be understood apart from each other. And in its internal meaning the Old Testament is really a life of the Lord. He came to "fulfill" the Law and the Prophets. You will understand this better when you are older.

Intermediate

The Intermediates are old enough to realize that the thought and feeling must be right as well as the conduct, although they are still in the stage when conduct is rightly their chief concern. Remind them that all the prophets are speaking to us, and that a single verse like Micah 6:8 really taken to heart can do a great deal to mold the right kind of character. The people they really respect are those they feel to be sincere. They themselves are quick to detect and condemn any goodness which is "put on."

All of the prophets are not arranged in historical order in the Bible. Bible students have given much time and study to the attempt to place the Minor Prophets from "internal evidence"; that is, things that are said and language forms that are used in the books themselves. The prophet Micah tells us his own place in history in

the first verse of the first chapter of the book. He was a contemporary of Isaiah and lived in Judah. Amos and Hosea were a little earlier and Jonah is thought to have been the earliest of all. Zephaniah prophesied in the reign of Josiah of Judah, Habakkuk in the last days of the kingdom and the beginning of the captivity, and Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi in the time of the return. The periods of Joel, Obadiah, and Nahum are uncertain. The message of the Minor Prophets is principally applicable to older people, but there are things in all of them which we can all understand.

In Micah there are two passages of special note. One is the prophecy in 5:2 which was the source of the direction given to the Wise Men in Matthew 2:1-6. The other is verse 8 of our chapter, one of the most beautiful and well known summaries in the Scriptures, a verse everyone should know by heart and think of often, for it gives in simple terms the requirements for a good life by which we may judge ourselves. A life, to be really good, must be right on all three planes, beginning with the lowest, the plane of external conduct, and ascending through love to the neighbor, which is the spiritual plane, to love to the Lord, which is the inmost or celestial plane. The Lord stated this same teaching in Matthew 23:23. It is easy to see the necessity of this when we remember that at death the inner life is opened and we take our places according to the quality of that inner life. In heaven, love to the Lord and the neighbor rule, and if we have not developed these loves, we cannot possibly be happy there.

No one attains inner goodness all at once. We have to begin by making our conduct right, then progress to cleansing our thoughts, and finally, if we persevere, the Lord will give us a "new heart" to replace our natural selfish inclinations. This is the process of reformation and regeneration, the "second birth" of which the Lord spoke to Nicodemus. Our part in it is to learn and do the Lord's will from day to day in little things as well as in big ones.

Micah, like all the prophets, called attention to the actual sins which the people were committing. We need to examine ourselves from time to time and single out our "besetting" sins in order that

we may fight them. As it is not enough just to do external good works, it is also not enough merely to confess that we are sinners in general. We must recognize and overcome particular faults one at a time.

Each of the Minor Prophets has a particular message for us. We should study them more as we grow older and have more life experience to draw on for understanding them. But we can all understand the rules for life which Micah gives us and use them from day to day as standards and guides.

Basic Correspondences

- Bethlehem = truth conjoined with good
burnt offerings = representatives of internal worship
sacrifices = representative worship from derivative faith
-

Senior

The position and value of the Minor Prophets should be stressed. All the Word of God is given "for our good always." The Seniors are drawing close to independent adult life and should be helped to realize the importance of choosing a proper pattern not only for their conduct but for their inner life as well. It is what they *are* which will actually count wherever they go and whatever they do in their lives, and not only in this world but in the life to come.

The twelve books which conclude the Old Testament are called the Minor Prophets. This is because they are short, not because they are less important than the others. When we look through Swedenborg's summary explanation of these books in his work *Prophets and Psalms*, we find that in the inner meaning they have to do with the complete "vastation" of the ancient Jewish Church through its accumulated evils and with the establishment of a new church of a more internal and therefore more genuine character. All twelve prophecies were spoken after the division of Solomon's kingdom into the two separate kingdoms of Israel and Judah. From the time of that division the decline of the nation was rapid. Jonah is thought to have been the earliest of the Minor Prophets,

but he was probably partly contemporary with Hosea and Amos, who place themselves in the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel and Amaziah and Uzziah of Judah, thus after the time of Asa and before that of Hezekiah. Micah, from whose book our lesson is taken, was a contemporary of the Major Prophet Isaiah, placing himself (Micah 1:1) in the time of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. The fall and captivity of Israel took place while Hezekiah was king in Judah; so the rest of the Minor Prophets belong to Judah after it was deprived of the protection of Israel. The three last, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, prophesied after the people of Judah returned from their own captivity in Babylon. We can, therefore, think of all the Minor Prophets as the voice of the Lord coming to us when our understanding has been undermined and taken captive by worldly reasonings and when our good intentions are either in the last throes of the struggle to hold out against selfishness or have actually been swept away by it. So the detailed study of the Minor Prophets is for older people rather than for Sunday school children. Nevertheless there are passages which are clear and helpful for anyone.

We have such a passage today in Micah 6:8, in which we are given in very simple terms the rules for a good life. Compare this verse with the Lord's words to the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:23. Outward acts of worship are necessary for us, but they should be done not as an end in themselves, but as an external expression of something genuine within. They are not a substitute for genuine day-to-day goodness. Three planes of requirement are described: justice in the outward acts, kindness and gentleness in the thoughts, and humility before the Lord in the heart. All these demand the overcoming of selfishness. We cannot be just in our outward acts if we put our own needs and interests first. We cannot be kind and gentle in thought if we believe others should always agree with us and defer to our opinions. We cannot be humble before the Lord if we do not seek always to learn of Him and to do His will rather than our own. See how verses 10 to 12 of our chapter single out the particular evils which the people of Judah

were committing in violation of the three rules. So we must examine ourselves in the light of the three rules and recognize the particular things in us—the particular actions and thoughts and feelings—which are standing in the way of our regeneration. And we must fight these failings one by one. No one can do this work for us. If we learn the three rules and accept them as our own yardstick from day to day, we shall grow better and happier all the time.

Adult

There are two important lessons here for Adults. One is that we need to read regularly all the Word—not just the parts which particularly appeal to us. The other is the simple outline of the good life found in Micah 6:8 in contrast to the many conflicting superficial ideas in the world around us. This verse provides endless food for thought and discussion.

We should all be familiar with the names of the twelve Minor Prophets, and for practical purposes it is best to know them in the order in which the books are found in our Bible, although this is not their exact chronological order. Little is known of their lives except from occasional statements in the books themselves, but they all claim direct divine inspiration and were included in the Judaic canon. Most of them state specifically the period in which they prophesied, but the periods of Joel, Obadiah, and Nahum are uncertain. Jonah is considered the earliest, the first great prophet after Elisha, and his book, unlike the others, contains considerable personal narrative. Hosea and Amos follow next after Jonah in time and were contemporaries. Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah. Zephaniah prophesied in the time of Josiah of Judah and Habakkuk in the time of Jehoiakim. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi were all prophets who lived during the restoration. Hosea, Amos, and Jonah prophesied in Israel and the others in Judah. These books are all so short that the ancient Hebrews wrote all twelve of them on one manuscript or scroll.

Even in the letter the books of the Prophets are often obscure and difficult. It is impossible to make a study of each of the twelve

Minor Prophets within the limits of a Sunday school course. In their letter they deal with the corrupt state of the Church, with the ruin which will inevitably follow upon such perversion of the divine gifts, and with the preservation of the good remnant and the coming of the Messiah. Many of them contain strange visions and commands which can be interpreted only by the law of correspondence. Only the book of Jonah contains narrative of the type which children can readily grasp. Yet all twelve, like the four Major Prophets, had a message which was essential to the people of their day and which, in its inner meaning, is essential to people of all time, to point out and condemn particular evil states and to give hope to those who are in despair. Even if much of the contents of the Minor Prophets seems incomprehensible to us, these books should be read reverently and attentively, in order that the letter may make its impression on the mind and be there for the Lord to use. We know that the reading of every part of the inspired Word connects us with particular societies in the heavens and serves them as well as helping us by new conjunctions. We shall also find many familiar prophecies in them which will help us to connect the Old and the New Testaments, and scattered through all twelve books there will be passages such as the one chosen for our reading today which are so direct and clear that they will come to serve us as constant guides to thought and conduct.

As we read any part of the Word, we should realize that it speaks to us. In our lesson the Lord, through the prophet Micah, calls upon the mountains to witness His dealings with His people. The mountains, picturing our states of nearness to the Lord when we look down upon our lives as from a height, do bear witness to the Lord's constant mercy and protection and to the blessings which He gives us freely. They also bear witness to our ingratitude and forgetfulness, and to our proneness to follow self-interest and worldly ways—to walk according to the statutes of Omri and the works of the house of Ahab. Yet the Lord's way is not hard or burdensome. He does not require us to give up anything that is really good or that will really make us happy. And He does not

leave us in the dark as to what the good life is: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

This is a verse which every one of us should know by heart and repeat often. The three requirements of a good life belong to the three planes, beginning with the outmost. "To do justly" is to be honest and upright and faithful in our outward conduct. This is the first step toward heaven, literal obedience to the commandments, reformation, the baptism with water. Many think it is enough, as the rich young man did. But the Lord tells us that we must also "love mercy." This is to love the neighbor. Abstract justice would permit us to punish those who injure us, to love only those who love us, but mercy requires that we love our enemies, bless those who curse us, and do good to those who despitefully use us and persecute us. This is the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Many stop here. They say, "If we are honest and faithful in our conduct and kind to our neighbors, what more can anyone ask?" The Lord does ask more. There is still the inmost plane, the most important of all since it determines the quality of all our thoughts and acts. On this inmost plane we are told to "walk humbly with thy God." The Lord said to the rich young man, "Sell whatsoever thou hast . . . and come, take up the cross, and follow me." Put most simply, this means that we must give up our own way whenever it is contrary to the Lord's. This is the essence of walking humbly with God, to recognize that all goodness, wisdom, and power are the Lord's, to study His Word, and to submit ourselves humbly to its guidance. This is to love the Lord, the baptism with fire. People can live outwardly correct lives and be kind to their neighbors and still within cherish pride and self-satisfaction and shut the Lord out of their hearts altogether. Heaven is where the Lord is. We cannot be in heaven either here or hereafter if the Lord is not in our hearts. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment."

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 10143: "By sacrifices and burnt-offerings was specifically signified purification from evils and falsities, and the implantation then of good and truth, and the conjunction of both, thus regeneration. The man who is in these is in genuine worship, for purification from evils and falsities consists in desisting from them, and in shunning and turning away from them; and the implantation of good and truth consists in thinking and willing what is good and true, and in speaking and doing them; and the conjunction of both consists in living from them; for when good and truth have been conjoined with a man, he then has a new will and a new understanding, consequently a new life. When a man is of this character, there is Divine worship in every work he does, for he then looks to the Divine in everything; he venerates it, and he loves it; consequently he worships it. That this is genuine Divine worship is unknown to those who make worship consist in adoration and prayers, thus in such things as are of the mouth and thought, and not in such as are of work from the good of love and the good of faith; when yet the Lord regards nothing else in the man who is in adoration and in prayers than his heart, that is, his interiors, such as they are in respect to love and the consequent faith. If therefore these interiors of man are not inwardly in adoration and prayers, there is no soul and life in them, but only an external such as is that of flatterers and pretenders, and that these are not pleasing to a wise man in the world is well known. In a word, to do according to the precepts of the Lord is truly to worship Him."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. From what book is our lesson today? *Micah*
- J. In which division of the divided kingdom did Micah prophesy? *Judah*
- J. Do you remember the name of one of the three kings in whose reigns he prophesied? *Joatham, Ahaz, Hezekiah*
- P. Why did the Lord send prophets? *to warn people about their wrongdoing*
- P. What were some of the bad things the people were doing in Micah's time? *cheating, lying, violence*
- J. What kind of worship did the people think would please the Lord? *sacrifice*
- P. What did Micah tell them would please the Lord? *to do justly, love mercy, walk humbly*
- J. What does "to do justly" mean? *be fair and honest*
- P. What does "to love mercy" mean? *be kind, helpful, forgiving*
- P. What does "to walk humbly with thy God" mean? *read Word, attend worship, try to do the Lord's will*

- I. To what three planes of our lives do these three requirements of the good life apply? *conduct, thought, will*
- S. Why are they given in this order in Micah's prophecy? *must begin by making our conduct right, progress to cleansing our thoughts, and finally receive a new will from the Lord*

REBUILDING THE TEMPLE

Haggai 1

The story of the rebuilding of the temple is an opportunity to review briefly the original plan and furnishings of the tabernacle. Point out that the ark disappeared from the Bible story at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. In all classes stress the fact that the people were allowed to return because the Lord was to be born among them in the Holy Land. This will make a good point for the transition to the New Testament.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord must come first in our lives if we are to have a sound character.

Notes for Parents

The honor in which the prophet Daniel was held in Babylon is evidenced by the fact that he was kept in high position not only under Nebuchadnezzar but also under Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian, who in turn took over the throne of Babylon. The ancient Hebrews were not made slaves in Babylon, but settled there, and many of them became prosperous and lost their interest in their own country.

But in order to fulfill many prophecies the Lord had to be born among the Jews and in the Holy Land. So it was necessary that at least some of them should return and that Jerusalem and the temple should be rebuilt. It had been prophesied through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:10) that this should happen after seventy years of captivity. Cyrus was the king who permitted the return—the historian Ezra says that Cyrus believed that the Lord charged him to build Him a house in Jerusalem—and Cyrus proclaimed that all who wished might go and also told those who did not wish to

return to give them aid in money, food, clothing, and animals. He himself restored to them the gold and silver vessels of the temple which Nebuchadnezzar had carried off.

When they reached their own land, the people set up an altar for sacrifice on the site of Solomon's temple and laid the foundations for a new temple. Then they did no more on it for sixteen years. They used as an excuse a difficulty they had with the Samaritans—the foreigners who had been brought in by Assyria to take the place of the people of Israel—but our chapter for today shows us that this was not the real reason.

The prophet Haggai was sent by the Lord to rebuke them and spur them on to finish the temple. He showed that the real trouble was that they were more interested in building their own houses and making themselves comfortable than they were in building the Lord's house.

How true this still is of many of us today! Our house is a symbol of our character. Our character is a temple of the Lord if it is built according to His directions and for His service, but many build only for their own comfort and advantage, and let this house of the Lord in themselves “lie waste.”

Haggai succeeded in shaming the people into resuming the building of the temple, and it was finished four years later.

Primary

The story of the return and rebuilding will interest even the little ones, and they can also get the lesson of Haggai's rebuke. It is not too early to put into their minds the thought that service of the Lord should come first in our lives. Speak of the Minor Prophets, noting that the last three were prophets of the restoration. Then tell the story and end with the lesson taught in Haggai 1, verse 4.

Do you remember about the beautiful temple of the Lord which king Solomon built in Jerusalem? When the people of Judah were conquered by the king of Babylon, this temple was destroyed and all its vessels of gold and silver were carried away with the people to Babylon.

But the Lord had promised the people of Judah that after seventy years they would be allowed to return to their own land, and the Lord always keeps His promises. After seventy years a king named Cyrus was inspired by the Lord with the thought that the temple at Jerusalem should be rebuilt.

He said that all who wanted to return might go, and that those who did not want to go should help them with money and animals and clothing.

About fifty thousand went back.

Cyrus let them take back the vessels of gold and silver which Nebuchadnezzar had carried off when he burned the temple.

When the people got back they first set up an altar where the temple had been. The next year they laid the foundation for the new temple.

Then they became discouraged and anxious to build their own homes, and for sixteen years they did no more on the temple.

What prophet was sent to rebuke them?

What did he tell them was the reason they had stopped building?

Of what kindnesses of the Lord did he remind them?

Did the people listen to him?

Yes, they began to build again and finished the new temple in four years.

Then they celebrated the Passover.

Junior

There is much interesting historical material for the Juniors in this lesson. The teacher should read carefully the first part of the Adult notes and summarize it for the children. Have them find the book of Ezra in the Bible and repeat the information they have already received concerning the books of the Bible which are not part of the Word and their value to us. Stress Haggai's rebuke and the necessity of putting the Lord first in our lives.

The people of Judah were not ill-treated in Babylon. And also they had something to look forward to, for the Lord had promised that after seventy years they would return to their own land. Read Jeremiah 29:10.

What Hebrew prophet rose to great power in Babylon?

Who were his three friends?

What did they do which brought them into danger?

Who saved them?

What was the effect on the king of Babylon?

When, not many years after the people of Judah were taken captive, the Persians became rulers of Babylon, their kings followed the example of Nebuchadnezzar and recognized Jehovah as a God to be respected. Finally the Lord put it into the heart of king Cyrus to allow the Hebrews to go back to the Holy Land and rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. Find the book of Ezra in your Bible. Ezra does not have an inner sense and therefore is not a book of the Word, but it gives us the history of the return of the people from captivity.

The first six chapters of Ezra tell the story of the rebuilding of the temple. It is an interesting story. When the people arrived at Jerusalem and looked at the ruined site of the temple, they first took an offering to pay for the work of rebuilding. Then they scattered to set up their own homes throughout the land and to plant crops. In the seventh month they went to Jerusalem to celebrate their harvest feast, the feast of tabernacles (Leviticus 23:33-36). At that time they set up the great altar for burnt offerings, and the next year they laid the foundations of the temple. But the Samaritans (who, you remember, had been brought into the land to take the place of the people of Israel) made trouble for them, and for sixteen years they were afraid to continue building.

What prophet did the Lord send to rebuke them?

What did Haggai say was the real reason for their delay?

What had been the result to them?

This time they obeyed the prophet, and in four years they finished the temple.* Cyrus had allowed them to bring back the vessels of the temple worship which had been carried off to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. But there was one thing that never came back. That was the ark. We know that the ark was in the Holy of Holies of Solomon's temple, but there is no record of what happened to it when the temple was destroyed. The presence of the Lord with the people was through the ark. So after they came back, they no longer represented the Lord's church on earth. The reason they

*See Ezra 3:8-6:15 for fuller details. —Ed.

were allowed to return was because it had been prophesied that the Lord would come into the world among the Jews and in the Holy Land. There are some records of their history during the four hundred years before that event took place, but they are not in our Bible. All we have are the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which tell of their return and the events which immediately followed it, and the books of three prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—who were sent to make sure they did what was necessary and to encourage the few good people who still remained among them by renewed promises of the coming of the Messiah.

After the temple was completed, they celebrated the Passover. Then they settled down into a type of national life, but they were always under the control of some foreign nation—Babylon first, and others later. You remember that when the Lord finally came, although the Jews had their own king, Herod, they were really ruled by the Roman governor.

Intermediate

In teaching this lesson emphasize the fact that, while the returned people of Judah felt that external circumstances were keeping them from finishing the temple, Haggai showed the real cause. In the same way, our own failures to grow spiritually actually come from within ourselves, no matter what excuses we may give for them. "Be honest with yourself" is a good rule to remember.

After Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon the captives from Judah were told that they might return to their own land. Many preferred to remain in Babylon because they were prosperous there. Those who returned were those who cared enough for their religion and their homeland to give up the comforts of Babylon for an unknown future in Canaan. Babylon represents the love of dominion from the love of self. This shows itself in each one of us in the tendency to think of ourselves as the center of everything and to expect others to do what we want. Such an attitude does enable people often to become successful and rich in a worldly sense, but Babylon is not our true home and we are called to leave it and return to the Holy Land of spiritual living.

The gold and silver vessels of the temple, carried off at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, had been preserved in Babylon in the houses of the Babylonian gods and were now given up by Cyrus to be restored to their proper use. Any container is a symbol of doctrine; the gold and silver vessels of the temple picture the doctrines of good and truth from the Word which teach us how to live rightly. But even these teachings can be employed in the service of self. The person who acts from so-called "enlightened self-interest" will keep the commandments in their external form. This is like the temple vessels kept in the houses of the Babylonian gods. But we ought to obey these doctrines from a desire to serve the Lord and not self, to do right because the Lord wills it and not because we feel we shall gain by it. The world today needs this type of return to the Lord from its captivity to selfish and worldly principles.

So the remnant of Judah had to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple on its true site. It was also necessary for them to return because the Holy Land was to be the scene of the Lord's life on earth. This was partly because He came to fulfill the prophecies in the Word and partly because of the correspondence of all the places in the Holy Land, which had been established in the time of the Ancient Church.

But, even after their return, they were more than twenty years in completing the new temple. The book of Ezra, although it does not contain an inner sense, tells the story. The Samaritans, you may remember, were the descendants of the people brought in by the Assyrians to take the place of the people of Israel in the northern part of the Holy Land. Because the returned people refused to allow the Samaritans to have a part in the rebuilding of the temple, the Samaritans misrepresented them to the king of Babylon and he commanded them to stop building. This action was used as an excuse to abandon the building, but it was only an excuse.

The prophet Haggai gives the real reason when he says: "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?" Our "ceiled houses" are our little narrow selfish satis-

factions, our comforts, our pleasures, our "rights" of which we take such good care. The house of the Lord which we should be building first is a character based on humility and service to the Lord. The building may seem to interfere with our getting things we want, even things we imagine to be necessary to our physical life, but Haggai shows that no matter how hard we work, if we do not build the Lord's house in the center of our lives, nothing we do will really prosper or bring us the satisfaction we expect. "Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes." Those who are thinking of themselves are never satisfied with what they have.

Basic Correspondences

any container = doctrine

the gold and silver vessels = doctrines of good and truth
of the temple from the Word

Senior

The same point suggested for the Intermediates should be further developed with the Seniors, carrying it into wider fields—business, politics, etc. Young people should face this tendency, which we all have, to shift responsibility for our failures to other influences of heredity or environment, and to put off real self-examination and correction.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah give us the historical account of the return of the people of Judah from captivity, the rebuilding of the temple, and the reorganization of national life immediately following. These two books do not have an inner meaning, but like other such books which are bound in our Bible they give us much helpful information and background material for our study of the Word. In Ezra 1:1-2 we read that "in the first year of the reign of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia," and Cyrus, in the proclamation he made at that

time, said that the Lord "charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah." Persia had at this time conquered and taken over the territory which had been Babylon. Jeremiah (29:10) had prophesied that after seventy years of captivity in Babylon the people would return to the Holy Land. Their return was necessary in order that the temple might be rebuilt and Judaism re-established in the Holy Land in preparation for the Lord's Advent there according to prophecy.

It is interesting to compare the circumstantial account of the rebuilding of the temple in the historical record of Ezra with the brief picture of the real heart of the matter given through the prophet Haggai. In Ezra we see the events as they looked on the outside, particularly as the people wished to record and remember them. In Haggai we see the hidden spiritual causes behind the events. From Ezra we might assume that the interference of the Samaritans was the real cause of the sixteen-year lapse in building operations. But from Haggai we learn that the cause was the willingness of the people themselves to find excuses for taking care of their own comfort instead of serving the Lord.

In verse 2 of our chapter we read: "This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." How often we allow apparent difficulties to persuade us to put off something we know we ought to do! This is true even in our own church. People say, "The world is not ready for the New Church doctrines; let us build up a strong organization first, and then the world will listen to us." We draw back from possible opposition, just as the people in Haggai's time drew back before the threats of the Samaritans, when all the while our failure to bring forth fruit is the result of this very faint-heartedness and concern for our own comfort. Notice that the conditions described in Haggai 1:6 are the fulfillment of a prophecy made in Micah 6:14-15.

All history can be studied in the light of a comparison between the point of view of Ezra and that of Haggai. We may imagine, for example, that the world wars were the result of certain political and economic conditions created by our enemies, but the real

cause was worldliness and selfishness in the hearts of all people, including ourselves. Wars, even world wars, begin in the hearts of individual men and women. Again, people imagine that peace can be attained and preserved by economic and political adjustments and by armies and navies and air forces and nuclear weapons. But peace begins in the hearts of individuals with humility and love to the Lord and the neighbor, for peace can come only from the Prince of Peace. If we cannot be just and merciful in our personal relations and settle our personal differences in the light of the Lord's teachings, we are not on the side of world peace. The temple of the Lord must be built first, the dwelling place of the Lord in the hearts and minds of individual men and women.

Ezra records that when the foundation of the new temple was laid, the old men who had seen the temple of Solomon mourned because the new one was so much less complete and impressive, and Haggai (2:3) reminds them of this feeling of disappointment. We are likely to be disappointed with our first efforts to rebuild a character that has been allowed to deteriorate. We all know how hard and discouraging is the effort to break a bad habit once it has been formed. But Haggai promises that if we are faithful the final result will be beyond all our expectations: "The glory of the latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts."

Adult

In this lesson the Adults will probably be most interested in the historical facts concerning the return and rebuilding, as these facts are so scattered through the Bible that most people do not have a clear picture from their own reading. The reason for the return is also an essential lesson, and the meaning of the lesson for our own lives should, of course, be pointed out.

In the last verse of the second book of Kings we read that in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Judah the king of Babylon began to show favor to Jehoiachin, the captive king. This was the beginning of the Lord's mercy in the fulfillment of the prophecy

of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:10)* that after seventy years the people should be permitted to return to the Holy Land. In Ezra 1:1 we read that "the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia" to have the temple rebuilt. We recall that Daniel converted Nebuchadnezzar to belief in Jehovah as the God of heaven. The later conquerors of Babylon, Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian, accepted this belief. The captives of Judah had prospered in worldly ways in Babylon and many of them had lost the desire to return to their own land. Cyrus bade all those who wished to do so to return and rebuild the temple, and he commanded those who preferred to remain in Chaldea to help the others "with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem." Cyrus also gave them back the vessels of gold and silver which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple. We are told that those who chose to go back in this first return numbered 42,360 beside 7,337 servants and maids. Zerubbabel was the leader of this return.

About eighty years later, in the reign of Artaxerxes, there was a second return under Ezra. At least 1750 men with their families returned at this time. Ezra was a direct descendant of Aaron and thus a priest as well as a scribe. Josephus says that he had been high priest of those who were left in Babylon. It is apparent that he was in high favor with the Persian king and he was given full authority to raise funds for the journey and for the service of the temple, to dispose affairs in Jerusalem, to appoint judges and magistrates, and to punish offenders even by death. The book of Ezra does not claim to be prophetic; it is a simple historical record beginning with the return under Zerubbabel and ending about a year after Ezra's return. Nehemiah (chapter 8) gives us an account of a great gathering of the people in Jerusalem at the feast of tabernacles, at which Ezra read to them from the Law. (Ezra and Nehemiah do not have an inner sense.)

In AE 1029^e Swedenborg gives us an interesting explanation of

*See also 25:11-12. Cf. Ps. 90:10.

the captivity and return (see below). This passage explains in part why there is no actual account in the books having an inner sense of the return from captivity. The people returned because it was necessary that the Word and the forms of worship be preserved in the Holy Land until the time was ripe for the Advent, but the people themselves could no longer be used to represent anything of good and truth. Three prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—were sent to them to show them their condition and to hold forth to the few good individuals the promise of the Messiah, but the details of their further history were no part of the prophetic Word, and are of interest to us only as they may help us to see the background of the Lord's life.

The purpose of Cyrus in allowing the people to return to the Holy Land was that they should build the house of the Lord, but after the foundations were laid, the work was discontinued for some sixteen years. The Samaritans—the aliens who had been brought in to take the place of the Israelites—offered to help in the rebuilding of the temple, but their assistance was refused by Zerubbabel, and from that time they hindered the work in every possible way and finally sent a letter to the current king of Babylon representing that Jerusalem had always been a rebellious city and should not be rebuilt. Their letter influenced the king to order the work on the temple stopped. And the men of Judah made no protest at that time. At last, however, under the exhortation of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, they sent a delegation to the new king, Darius, and at their request Darius hunted out the original decree of Cyrus, which as a law of the Medes and Persians could not be changed. So the work was undertaken again and completed in four years, a period of a little more than twenty years elapsing between the laying of the foundation and the completion of the temple. It was dedicated with appropriate ceremonies and offerings and with the celebration of the Passover. Throughout the Old Testament the celebration of the Passover signalized the accomplishment of each step in the progress of the nation and each great reform.

We recall that the temple pictures the dwelling place of the Lord in us, a character built according to the Lord's plan. The rebuilding of the temple pictures an effort to return to goodness after one has fallen into evil. The prophet Haggai shows us how quickly the people were turned from their high purposes when once they had actually returned to the Holy Land. They built their own houses but let the house of the Lord lie waste. This is a picture of a life outwardly reformed but lacking genuine consecration to the Lord—still caring for self first. This kind of reformation does not bring happiness or peace. "Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house." The ark was gone from the Holy of Holies. There is no mention of its being preserved or restored after the destruction of Solomon's temple. The heart was empty of the Lord's presence. The restoration of the nation was merely an external one.

So it is with us sometimes when we try to reform. The way back is not so easy or so happy as we expected. We reinstate ourselves in orderly external living and perhaps in the respect of the community, but our real character must be built up all over again, and that is a long, slow process. The Lord does not come to the new temple until we have fully realized our own helplessness and know that nothing but His presence can save us or bring us happiness and peace. No temple which we erect with our own reputation or glory in view can endure. The temple of Zerubbabel suffered one partial destruction and another rebuilding before the Lord's time, and this structure fell into complete decay, and under Herod a new temple—the one of the Gospels—was erected. This was finally destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.

But the prophets of the restoration period firmly held out to those who would be faithful the promise that their days of mourning should end. "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings" (Malachi 4:2). "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith

the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts." (Haggai 2:9) The Old Testament closes with the promise of sure reward to those who look to the Lord instead of to self and persistently obey Him.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 1029^e: "When, therefore, the sons of Israel wholly departed from the statutes which were representative of the spiritual things of the church, through which they had communication with heaven, they were all given into the hands of the king of Assyria; for there was no longer with them any representative church and consequently no communication with heaven. . . . The same thing happened to the Jews. When they had adulterated and profaned all the statutes, judgments, and laws that represented good and truth of faith, to the extent that there was no longer any thing of good and truth left, and when their church thus became Babylon, then not only their kings and princes and the whole people, but also all the treasures of the house of Jehovah, and afterwards all its golden vessels, were given into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon; and moreover the temple itself was burned. . . . All these things signify the profanation of the holy things of the church. Such profanation is signified also by 'Babylon.' That the land, therefore, which signified the church might no longer be profaned by them, and also that Babylon might thus fully put on its representation, it was said to them by Jeremiah that they should surrender themselves voluntarily into the hands of the king of Babylon, and if they did not so surrender themselves, but remained in the land, they should die by the sword, famine, and pestilence (Jeremiah 25:1-11). But since the Lord was to be born in that nation and make Himself manifest where the church then was and where His Word was, so that nation after a captivity of seventy years was brought back from Babylon, and the temple was rebuilt. And yet no other church remained with them except a church like that called Babylon, as can be seen from many things which the Lord Himself said about that nation, and from the way they received Him; and for this reason Jerusalem was again destroyed, and the temple burnt with fire."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. Under what ruler were the people of Judah allowed to return to the Holy Land? *Cyrus*
- J. How long was this after they were taken captive? *seventy years*

- P. What did king Cyrus tell them to do? *rebuild the temple*
- P. What did he give them to take back? *gold and silver vessels taken from the temple*
- J. What excuse did they give for not finishing the temple? *not yet time*
- P. What prophet was sent to rebuke them? *Haggai*
- J. What did he tell them was the real reason they had stopped? *more interested in their own comfort*
- I. What do the gold and silver vessels of the temple picture? *teachings from the Word of how to live rightly*
- S. Why was it necessary that the Jews return to the Holy Land? *to rebuild temple and re-establish Judaism in the Holy Land preparatory to the coming of the Lord*

PROPHETS OF THE RESTORATION

Zechariah 4

The teachers should read Ezra 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 to get a complete background for the lesson on Zechariah.

Doctrinal Points

The rebuilding of the temple was necessary as a preparation for the Lord's Advent.

The last three of the Minor Prophets prophesied after the return from captivity.

*We should believe that the Lord is able to carry out His intentions.
Love is essential.*

Notes for Parents

I imagine that if most of us were asked, "What do you know about the Minor Prophets?" we might have to confess that we know very little. Perhaps we know that there were twelve of them and that their books are the last twelve books of the Old Testament. Some of us will remember that they begin with Hosea and end with Malachi. And most of us would remember a little of the story of Jonah. But just what the messages of the Minor Prophets were and what they mean for us we might find it hard to say.

Yet the books of the Minor Prophets are just as inspired and just as important as the other books of the Word. It merely takes a little more effort and study to understand them. And we often find in them single verses which we have heard quoted and which teach us an immediate and clear lesson.

Take our chapter for today as an example of what we can find out with a little study. We should know first that the last three of the Minor Prophets prophesied in the "Restoration" period, after the remnant was sent back from Babylon and commanded to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. Cyrus said the Lord had charged

him to do this. The Lord, when He came, was to fulfill the Law and the Prophets; so He had to come among the people who had the Hebrew Scriptures. And He had to live in the Holy Land, which from the beginning of time had been the setting for the Bible story. So the Lord provided that the people of Judah, after seventy years of captivity in Babylon, should return and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple.

They had not been back very long, however, and had only laid the foundation of the temple, when they lost their enthusiasm for building the house of the Lord and turned to the building of homes for themselves instead. This reminds us, perhaps, of some short-lived good resolutions of our own. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah were inspired to rebuke them and urge them on. The Zerubbabel mentioned in our chapter was a grandson of king Jehoiachin of Judah and the leader of the returned captives. Zechariah's message to him is that if he will continue the building faithfully, the Lord will give him power to complete the work.

But this chapter has a lesson for us, too. We can all see that throughout the Bible light is the symbol of truth—for example, the Lord said, “I am the light of the world.” But He also said, “Ye are the light of the world.” The lampstand is the church in the world and in every individual one of us who will study the Word, try to live as it teaches us to live, and so obey the Lord’s command: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” Again we can easily see that the oil which burns in lamps stands for love. We remember the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25); the wise virgins took oil in their lamps. Throughout the Bible olive trees and olive oil are symbols of love. What are the two olive trees which stand one on either side of the candlestick and pour oil into its lamps? What are the two great loves which must be in our hearts if we are to make our lives temples of the Lord? Jesus said: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Primary

The teacher may spend a good part of the lesson period telling the story of the return from captivity and the rebuilding of the temple. Then speak of the Minor Prophets and especially of the last three, and read the lesson from the Word. The children may be interested in hearing of the various ways in which the prophets were inspired. This information will be found in the Junior notes.

Most of the Minor Prophets lived in Judah or Israel before the people were carried away, but the last three came later. We learned one Sunday that when the people of Israel were carried away to Assyria, they never came back. But some of the people of Judah did.

King Cyrus, who followed Darius as king of Babylon, was told by the Lord to let them return.

He gave them back all the gold and silver vessels of the temple which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away.

Many of the people did not want to go back, but they helped those who went with money and supplies and animals.

The leader of the returning captives was Zerubbabel, a grandson of king Jehoiachin of Judah.

More than forty-two thousand returned to the Holy Land. They rebuilt Jerusalem and started to build the temple. But they stopped in the middle of building the temple and began to build homes for themselves instead. So the Lord had to speak to them again and tell them to finish the temple first. The last three of the Minor Prophets were the ones through whom He spoke to them at this time.

One of these was Zechariah.

In our lesson for today how did his vision come to him?

What did he see?

What did the angel tell him the seven lamps on the candlestick meant?

What did the two olive trees mean?

Junior

The lesson for this class is principally a factual account of the return from

captivity and the reason the three prophets of the restoration had to be sent, and a study of prophecy in general. But the lessons suggested in the last paragraph of the Junior notes should also be pointed out.

The last three of the Minor Prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—prophesied after the people returned from captivity. Cyrus the Persian, the king who followed Darius the Mede on the throne of Babylon, issued a proclamation in the very first year of his reign that all those who wished might go back to the land of Canaan. We find the story of the return in the book of Ezra, which is not one of the books of the Bible which has an inner sense, but which gives us very valuable historical information. Ezra says that “the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus” to let the people go back, and Cyrus in his proclamation said that the Lord had charged him to build Him a house in Jerusalem. So the people who did not wish to go back were ordered to make a “freewill offering” toward the rebuilding of the temple and also to help those who went back “with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts,” and Cyrus himself gave them back all the gold and silver vessels of the temple which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away. Ezra tells us that there were fifty-four hundred of these vessels. More than forty-two thousand of the people went back under the leadership of Zerubbabel, who was a grandson of Jehoiachin, the next-to-the-last king of Judah.

But after the returned captives had laid the foundation of the temple, they began to think about their own comfort and left the temple and built houses for themselves instead. Then the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were inspired to rebuke them and urge them on to the completion of the temple. Do we ever get tired of doing something which needs very much to be done and turn to something which we think will be more fun?

Now read the first verse of our chapter for today. We often wonder just how the prophets were inspired, and this shows us one of the ways: Zechariah says an angel woke him in the night and then he saw a vision and the angel told him what it meant. In other places in the Bible other methods are mentioned. Sometimes

the prophets were instructed by dreams, sometimes by visions in the daytime, sometimes by a voice heard within them, sometimes by speech with an angel who appeared to them, and sometimes by a voice heard from without. In every case, however, they had no doubt whatever that the dream or vision or voice came from the Lord.

What did Zechariah see?

To whom was Zechariah to give the message?

What was he to tell Zerubbabel first?

What was said about the temple?

What did the angel say the seven lamps were?

What were the two olive trees?

You will be able to understand the meaning of this vision better when you are older, but there are two or three lessons you can find in it now. One is that it is by the Lord's spirit and power that anything good is accomplished—not by our own strength or ability. Another is that the Lord is able to finish any work He begins; so we should not allow ourselves to be discouraged from trying to do right. A third is that divine providence sees and takes into account every least thing that happens anywhere. We learn this from verse 10. If you will read Revelation 5:6 and 11:4 you will see that the same symbolic visions were given to the apostle John hundreds of years later; so we know that they were meant not just for the people of Bible days but for us and for all people.

Intermediate

The real lesson for the Intermediates is the correspondence of Zechariah's vision, together with the necessity for the return. Facts concerning the Minor Prophets and concerning the return should be given as background.

The last twelve books in the Old Testament are called the Minor Prophets. They are short books and in the letter often rather hard to understand, but they are just as important as any other part of the Word. If the messages of these prophets had not been meant for people of all times, the Lord would not have had them recorded in the Word.

Some of these books are so short that they give us little clue to the time in which the prophets themselves lived, but most of them lived in Judah or Israel before the time of the captivity. The last three, however—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—are called prophets of the restoration. The Darius who is mentioned by both Haggai and Zechariah is not the Darius who cast Daniel into the den of lions, but a later king of the same name.

Cyrus the Persian took the throne of Babylon after the first Darius, and we read in the book of Ezra—which is a very valuable historical book although not one which contains an inner sense—that in the first year of his reign “the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus” to let the captives from Judah go back to their own land. Because the Lord was to come into the world in the Holy Land and among the Jews, it was necessary that the nation be re-established there and that Jerusalem and the temple be rebuilt.

All the captives did not want to go back. Some were apparently quite satisfied with their life in Babylon. But, as we learn from the books of Ezekiel and Daniel, there were at least a few who had remained faithful to their own religion and longed to go back. Others possibly thought that their opportunities to prosper would be greater in the land of Canaan than in Babylon. You can easily see what these three classes of people picture. When a person who has been brought up in the church is carried away by worldly ambition, there is a part of his nature which is perfectly satisfied with the worldly life. But deep down inside him there is some little remembrance of the better life in which his childhood was passed and some little feeling that he ought to return to it. And then there is in such a person a restlessness and dissatisfaction with his present condition which makes him feel that any change must be for the better.

More than forty-two thousand returned to the land of Canaan. Their leader was Zerubbabel, who was a grandson of Jechoiachin, the last really independent king of Judah. We should note that Zerubbabel never was called king. The land of Canaan remained under the control of Babylon.

Cyrus said that he had been charged by the Lord "to build him an house at Jerusalem," and he ordered the people to rebuild the temple and had those who remained in Babylon make a freewill offering toward it and also help those who returned "with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts." And Cyrus himself gave them back all the gold and silver vessels of the temple which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away when the temple was destroyed.

In their first enthusiasm the returned captives laid the foundation of the temple, but then their natural selfishness cropped up again. They had some trouble with the Samaritans—the people, you remember, who had been brought in by Assyria to take the place of the people of Israel—and after Cyrus died, his successor forgot the command of Cyrus in regard to the temple. So the people turned to building houses for themselves and, just as they always had been, they were led astray into the ways of the people about them. Then the Lord sent the last three of the prophets to rebuke them and to encourage them to complete the building of the temple.

The vision of Zechariah in our chapter for today is part of this encouragement. Zerubbabel had used the opposition of the Samaritans as an excuse for discontinuing work on the temple. Verse 6 of our chapter is the Lord's answer to this excuse, and the Lord is at the same time saying it to us when we allow ourselves to be easily discouraged from the building of the "temple" of a heavenly character in ourselves. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." We are not strong enough of ourselves to resist our temptations and do good, but if we keep trying, the Lord will accomplish it for us.

Zechariah's vision is not too hard to understand. You remember that the seven-branched candlestick in the Holy Place of the tabernacle represented divine truth from the Word enlightening our minds. It represents the same here, but there is added the statement that the seven lamps are "the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth" (read also Revelation 5:6). This

pictures the fact that the Lord's divine providence sees everything that goes on in the world and makes provision for it, and that the truths of the Word will enable us to understand everything that happens to us and meet it as we should.

Then there are the two olive trees which furnished the oil for the lamps. Here read Revelation 11:4. The last verse of our chapter tells us that the two olive trees are the "two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." We know that oil represents love. There are two kinds of love which we have from the Lord, love to the Lord and love to the neighbor. These are the olive trees and they belong just where they are in the vision, one on either side of the candlestick, supplying oil for it. Love to the Lord takes us to the Word to find out all we can about Him, and love to the neighbor takes us to the Word to find out all we can about helping others.

Basic Correspondences

lampstand = the Word as containant of divine truth

oil = love

the two olive trees = love to the Lord and love to the neighbor

Senior

It is important that the Seniors have a clear knowledge of the history of the return and restoration as a background for the story of the New Testament. The general lesson from Zechariah 4, suggested at the end of their notes, is also important.

Many of us do not know much about the Minor Prophets. They are short books—the last twelve in the Old Testament—and in the letter their meaning is often obscure. The book of Jonah is the only one of them which has in it a continuous story, and for that reason it is better known than the others. But the books of the Minor Prophets are just as important for us as any other part of the Word of God. The Lord has nothing recorded in the Word which did not contain a message needed by people in all times.

We should read the Minor Prophets even though we do not understand them, partly because we know that our reverent reading of any part of the Word enables the angels who are with us to read it at the same time in its spiritual sense, and partly because as we read, the words are recorded in our memories and the Lord can recall them to us with meaning at some future time when we need their message. Further than this, if we really make the effort to study any particular chapter with the help of the writings, we shall find some lessons in it which will be helpful to us now, either by showing us states into which we have fallen or by pointing out trends in us which may be leading us in the wrong direction. Or, as in our chapter for today, we may find inspiration to be more faithful and persistent in our efforts to lead the heavenly life.

The last three of the Minor Prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—are called the Prophets of the Restoration. Seventy years after Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and most of the people of Judah carried off to Babylon, all of them who wished to do so were allowed to return. In the book of Ezra, which does not contain an inner sense but is nevertheless a very useful historical book, we are told that “in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia” to permit this return, and the proclamation of Cyrus declares that the Lord “hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem which is in Judah.” Zerubbabel, a grandson of king Jehoiachin, was appointed to lead the return, and more than forty-two thousand went with him. Cyrus gave them back all the gold and silver vessels of the temple which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away, and he ordered all those who preferred to remain in Babylon to give a freewill offering toward the rebuilding of the temple and also to help those who went “with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts.”

The captives returned with rejoicing (read Psalm 126) and laid the foundation of the temple. But they rejected the overtures of the Samaritans—the people, you remember, who had been brought

in to settle the northern part of the land when Assyria conquered Israel—and the Samaritans in return sent an embassy to Ahasuerus and later to Artaxerxes, the kings who succeeded Cyrus on the throne of Babylon, and Artaxerxes was persuaded to order the building stopped. The men of Judah weakly obeyed and turned their energies to the building of houses for themselves, at the same time falling back into their old habit of association with the people of the land. It was not until the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were inspired to rebuke and urge them on that they sent messengers of their own to Babylon. By their representations king Darius (the second Darius, who followed Artaxerxes) was led to unearth the original statute of Cyrus—which, as one of the “laws of the Medes and Persians” could not be changed—and he authorized the people to complete the temple. This they finally did, celebrating the feast of the Passover at its dedication.

We should all be familiar with this story of the return because it re-established Judaism in the Holy Land. The Lord had to be born in the Holy Land because of its correspondence; and because He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, He had to come among the people who alone had them. Therefore the return was necessary. But we should also remember that the nation was no longer the representative of the Lord’s church on earth. It is for this reason that the record of their history from the time of the captivity is not part of the inspired Word.

Our chapter for today, as we can easily see, is a vision given to Zechariah to be passed on to Zerubbabel to encourage him to complete the temple. The quotation at the end of this lesson gives us the meaning of some of the details of the vision, which is referred to by John in Revelation 11:4. We should note that Swedenborg, possibly following the Latin of Schmidius [*baccae olivarum, . . . filii oleae*], gives us “olive berries” instead of “olive branches” and “sons of the olive-tree” instead of “anointed ones.”* The chapter has an important message for all of us, for we are often

*The Hebrew has “olive twig” and “sons of the oil.” —Ed.

like Zerubbabel, too ready to drop the effort to become the spiritual men and women we ought to be, and to turn our efforts to making ourselves more comfortable and prosperous in the world. You remember that the temple, the house of the Lord, is a representative of a heavenly character, which is the church in each one. We should all keep before us from day to day this vision of the golden lampstand and the two olive trees to remind us of our true goal in life and of the fact that only by obedience to the two great commandments can we attain this goal. We have no goodness or truth or power of ourselves, but as we persevere in the study of divine truth in the Word and in obedience to it, the Lord will complete our temple. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

Adult

There are two major objectives for the teacher of Adults in this lesson. One is to give as clear a story of the return as possible, pointing out the reason for it and making clear the diminished role of the ancient Jewish nation. The other is to make the chapter itself as meaningful and inspiring as possible.

The Minor Prophets are seldom used for lessons in Sunday school. With the exception of the book of Jonah they contain little in story form, and even grown people often find them obscure. Yet they are as important for us as any part of the Word. If they had not contained lessons which all people need, the Lord would not have provided for their recording. As we all know, there are twelve books of the Minor Prophets, beginning with Hosea and ending with Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament. Some of them in the letter place themselves historically. The exact period of others is uncertain, but the first nine all prophesied before the captivity. It is thought that Obadiah may have witnessed the fall of Jerusalem and been carried away with the captives.

The last three of the Minor Prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—were sent after the return from captivity. The story of the return is told in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which are

therefore very valuable books although they do not have an inner sense. It had been given Jeremiah to prophesy (Jeremiah 25:12; 29:10) that after seventy years in Babylon some of the people would return to the Holy Land. So the first verse of the book of Ezra tells us: "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom." In his proclamation Cyrus said that the Lord had charged him "to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah," and that all of those who so desired might now return to their own land. The people knew, therefore, that the rebuilding of the temple was the primary cause and purpose of their return, and Cyrus restored to them all the gold and silver vessels of the temple which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away. He also charged those who did not return to make a freewill offering for the rebuilding of the temple and also to help their returning brethren "with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts."

More than forty-two thousand returned, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, a grandson of king Jehoiachin, and the foundation of the temple was laid with great rejoicing, although some of the "ancient men" wept because they could see that the new temple was not to be so large and impressive as the former one. But now the Samaritans, whose offer of help in the building had been rebuffed by Zerubbabel, made false representations to the kings who had succeeded Cyrus in Babylon, and the people received a command not to continue the building. As we learn from the prophet Haggai, instead of protesting they yielded all too willingly and turned to the building of their own houses. At the urging of Haggai, however, they finally sent an embassy to the second Darius, as a result of which he unearthed the original statute of Cyrus and, as this was one of the laws of the Medes and Persians—which, we recall, "change not"—he ordered the building resumed. The temple was completed, and at its dedication the feast of the Passover was celebrated.

It is important for us to know this history because it gives us the background of the New Testament story. The Lord came to fulfill the Old Testament Scriptures. He had to come, therefore, among those who possessed them. And Swedenborg tells us that because the Holy Land had been the home of the people of both the Most Ancient and the Ancient Churches and its geography had accordingly become correspondent in all its features, the Lord had to come in the Holy Land. So it was under divine providence that the remnant was brought back and driven to complete the temple. But we remember that the nation no longer represented the Lord's church on earth. Its history after the captivity, except for the warnings of the three prophets, forms no part of the inspired Word. Scholars, especially since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, have been much occupied with this history in an effort to trace the sources of the various sects in Palestine near the beginning of the Christian era. But we need not concern ourselves too much with their speculations, interesting though they are. The roots of the rejection of the Lord were in the people themselves who so reacted, not in any influences coming from without.

In his summary of the meaning of the prophecies of the last three Minor Prophets in *Prophets and Psalms*, Swedenborg shows us that they deal with the complete vastation of the ancient Jewish Church and with the imminent coming of the Lord and establishment of the Christian Church. There are a number of statements in these Prophets which latter-day Jews, knowing only the letter, quite naturally interpret as promises of the eventual restoration of their nation to preeminence in the world, but in the spiritual sense there is no suggestion of this.

Our chapter for today has still further implications. Read Revelation 11:4. This ties in the vision of Zechariah with the vision of John and with the Second Coming. In explaining Revelation 11:4 in the *Apocalypse Explained* (see below), Swedenborg quotes from our chapter.*

*See note on Senior notes regarding the translation of certain phrases. —Ed.

In our own personal lives we may think of this chapter as a charge and encouragement to complete the building of our temple—the church in us. In AC 9548⁴ we are told that Zerubbabel, “who should found the house of God and perfect it,” represents “the Lord who would come, and would restore the Spiritual Heaven and Church.” We become discouraged sometimes. There seem to be too many claims made upon us by our necessities in the world and too much opposition within us to our regeneration. But it is the Lord who is really building our temple and He is able to finish what He has begun, if we can only keep the vision fresh in our minds. We remember that in the first chapter of Revelation the seven candlesticks, or lampstands, were the seven churches. Each of us, insofar as he is faithful to the teachings of the Word, is a church or lampstand. The seven lamps, the “eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth,” picture the omniscience of divine providence, which sees our every thought and desire and leads us as straight and as far as we are willing to be led (see Ezekiel 1:18). The two olive trees or olive berries which pour oil into the lamps are the two great commandments—love to the Lord and love to the neighbor. And we should especially note the question, “Who hath despised the day of small things?” It is not by the moments of great crisis that the strength of our purpose is tested and measured, but by the things we do and think and feel in the little affairs of everyday life.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 638⁷: “This treats of the foundation of the house or temple by Zerubbabel; and the ‘house’ or ‘temple’ signifies the church, therefore a ‘lampstand’ was seen by the prophet, and ‘near it two olive-trees,’ almost the same as what was seen by John here in the *Apocalypse*; and the ‘two olive-trees’ and the ‘olive berries’ signify celestial goods, which are the goods of love to the Lord and of love towards a brother or companion; the former good is signified by ‘the olive-tree seen at the right side of the bowl,’ and the latter by ‘the olive-tree seen near the left side.’ The truths of this good are meant by ‘the sons of the olive-tree standing by the Lord of the

whole earth,' 'to stand by Him' signifying to be and to exist from Him."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. How long did the captivity in Babylon last? *about seventy years*
- P. What king permitted the people to go back to the Holy Land? *Cyrus of Persia*
- P. What did he tell them to do? *rebuild the temple*
- J. Who was their leader? *Zerubbabel*
- P. Did all the people want to go back? *no*
- P. What were those who remained in Babylon told to do? *give money and supplies*
- J. Why did those who returned interrupt the building of the temple? *more interested in their own comfort*
- P. What did they build instead? *houses for themselves*
- P. How did the Lord rebuke them? *through prophets (Haggai and Zechariah)*
- J. In our chapter how did Zechariah's vision come to him? *from an angel*
- J. What did he see in the vision? *lampstand and two olive trees*
- J. What message was given him for Zerubbabel? *"not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit"*
- J. What did the angel tell him the lamps were? *the eyes of the Lord*
- I. What were the two olive trees? *two anointed ones (love of Lord and neighbor)*
- I. What does the temple represent? *a heavenly character, or the church in us*
- I. What is pictured by the lampstand? *the Word, containing divine truth*
- S. What are the "eyes of the Lord"? *His divine providence*
- S. What do the olive trees picture? *the good of love to the Lord and love to the neighbor*

PROPHECIES OF THE ADVENT

Malachi 3; 4

Mention the two parts of the Bible and explain if necessary the meaning of the word *Testament*, before taking up the lesson for today.

Doctrinal Points

The coming of the Lord was prophesied at the very end of the Old Testament.

The prophets all spoke the words the Lord gave them to speak.

Trust in one's own wisdom is the opposite of faith.

The good will always be saved.

Notes for Parents

With this lesson we come to the end of the Old Testament. The name *Malachi* means "my messenger," and the prophecies given through Malachi were among the chief comforts of the good among the Jews during the four hundred years which followed, before the Lord came into the world. For in spite of all the warnings given it and in spite of the bitter experience of captivity, the ancient Jewish Church as a church never returned to obedience. As we learn from the Gospels, the priests and elders overlaid the Word of God with traditions of their own, more serviceable to them in worldly ways, until the simple people did not know right from wrong. In all those four hundred years no more prophets were sent to them. Through Malachi they had their final warning.

But through Malachi the Lord had also promised that one day He Himself would come into the world and that those who remained faithful would be prepared for His coming so that they could receive Him with joy. Verse 17 of our chapter is a beautiful one for the children to hold in their minds. If they are good, they

will be counted among the Lord's jewels. And the second verse of chapter 4 is a beautiful promise, too. For the Lord's coming into our lives—if we are of those who really want to be good men and women—is like the sunrise, bringing the clear light of understanding to our minds and the warmth of love to our hearts, and healing the spiritual diseases which have been festering in our souls.

Primary

Although some of these children may not be able to read, they can be shown the two divisions of the Bible, learn their names, and the meaning of the word *Testament*. They may also be taught what a prophecy is and the difference between the Lord's means of speaking with the people in the Old Testament and in the New. Read them Malachi 3:17 and tell them that when they are good they are the Lord's jewels. Talk about the nature of the covenant between God and men and the difference in the way in which the Lord's coming affects the good and the evil.

Our lesson today is from the last two chapters of the last book of the Old Testament. Perhaps you know that our Bible is divided into two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. Your teacher will show them to you. A testament is a solemn covenant or agreement. The testaments in our Bible tell us about the agreement the Lord makes with men on earth. You remember that all through our lessons the Lord has been promising that if the people would obey Him, He would take care of them and make them happy. In the Old Testament the Lord makes these promises through Moses and the Prophets. Man's part of the agreement is the promise to obey the Lord.

But we have learned that the people in the Holy Land did not keep their part of the agreement, and so the Lord could not keep them safe and happy. Let us read our lesson for today. [Read Malachi 3:1-2; 4:1-6.] You see that here at the very end of the Old Testament the Lord told the people that a time was coming when He Himself would come into the world. The bad people who had not been obeying Him would be afraid when He came, just as you are sometimes afraid when your mother finds you doing

something naughty. But the good people would welcome Him.

A foretelling of something that is going to happen is called a prophecy. Malachi 4:2 tells how the Lord's coming will seem to the good. You know that it is the sun which makes the daytime when we can see all the beautiful things around us and work and play together. So the Lord's coming is to be like the rising of the sun in the morning, making everything bright and clear.

Can you think of any kind of people who prefer darkness to sunlight?

The Lord says that the wicked will be afraid when He comes, but the good will welcome Him.

Who is to be sent before the Lord to prepare His way?

Who was Elijah?

This prophecy really means that someone very much like Elijah would come to prepare people for the coming of the Lord. This man was John the Baptist.

Junior

This is a good lesson in which to bring out the meaning of *Testament* and the difference between the Old and the New. The Juniors should get as definite an idea as possible of the structure of the Bible. The difference between willful wrongdoing and wrongdoing from ignorance is another important lesson; also that evil lies in putting self-interest above the desire to do what the Lord says is right. Stress the prophecy in regard to Elijah as a preparation for beginning study of the New Testament.

You remember that after seventy years of captivity in Babylon the people were allowed to return to the Holy Land. They did not all return. Some had become satisfied with their life in Babylon and did not want to go back. They helped the others, however, with money and supplies, and the king restored part of the vessels and treasures of the temple which had been carried to Babylon. After some delays and difficulties Jerusalem and the temple were rebuilt, but there is no mention that the ark was ever restored. No one ever knew what became of it.

After the return three prophets were raised up among them: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The word *Malachi* means "my

messenger." Almost all the prophets foretell the coming of the Lord, but the prophecies in the last two chapters of Malachi are those which most directly connect the Old Testament with the New.

In the first verse of chapter 3 Malachi speaks of a messenger who shall prepare the way before the Lord, and then he speaks of the Lord Himself as the "messenger of the covenant." So you see there are two different messages to be given. The first is only a preparation for the second. The Lord Himself will make a new covenant or agreement with men. To see what this covenant was to be, look up John 13:34-35 and then Matthew 5:17-18. The covenant which the Lord Himself made with men when He came into the world in person was based on the keeping of the commandments just as the Old Testament covenant had been, but the commandments were to be kept in a new spirit of unselfish love. More than mere obedience is required of those who want to be disciples of the Lord.

Two kinds of people are described in our lesson: the people whose first interest is in their own worldly prosperity and the people who want more than anything else to do right in the Lord's sight. The Lord through Malachi for the last time warned those who were of the selfish kind and told them that if they would only change their ways and return to the keeping of the law, He would still spare them and prosper them. But His words had no effect on the worldly and selfish. The nation continued for four hundred years after Malachi before the Lord came, but no more prophets were sent to it. The people observed the outward forms of their worship, but their hearts were unchanged; we learn this from many things the Lord says in the Gospels.

Yet there were good people among them in Malachi's time and there were still good people among them when the Lord came, as we shall see when we begin the study of the New Testament.

In our lesson how does the Lord say His coming will affect the evil?
How will it affect the good?

In verse 2 of chapter 4 to what does the Lord compare His coming?

In the Word the Lord is often compared to the sun, because He

gives warmth and light—love and truth—to our souls just as the sun gives warmth and light to our bodies.

Now read the last two verses of chapter 4, the very last verses of the Old Testament.

Who is to be the messenger who will prepare the way of the Lord?

What is he to do?

Why is this preparation necessary?

All of you come from homes in which you are taught what is right and wrong, and you go to Sunday school and learn about the Lord and what He wants you to do and to be. But you know that there are some children who do not have these advantages. They have just as good intentions as you have, but they grow up doing many very wrong things because they do not know any better. Do you remember how badly king Josiah felt when he found the book of the law and realized how many wrong things the people had been doing, partly because they didn't know any better? If people were to be brought too suddenly to see just how bad their lives were, it would be something like a stroke of lightning. They would feel that they were beyond all hope. They need to be shown first some of the wrong things they are doing and encouraged to give them up, and then when they find it is possible and that they are happier in right ways, they are ready to learn about the deeper things which the Lord requires of them.

That was the way it was with the good people when the Lord came. Their priests and the scribes and Pharisees had not been teaching them what the Lord really wanted them to do, but only things which would make these selfish leaders richer and more powerful. Read Matthew 15:1-9. So even the good people were doing many very wrong things from ignorance, and the messenger had to be sent to them to prepare them before they could receive the Lord.

Intermediate

The correspondence of a number of verses from the lesson has been suggested

in the Intermediate notes, but the principal lesson this time is the historical position of Malachi as the last prophet sent to the ancient Jewish Church and the general meaning of his prophecies in relation to the end of that church era.

We have come to our last lesson in the Old Testament. The last three of the Minor Prophets prophesied after the return from captivity in Babylon. In Malachi's time Jerusalem and the temple had been rebuilt and worship was being conducted according to the rites prescribed through Moses. But most of the people had not really changed at heart. They had come back not from any real desire to serve the Lord but in the hope of re-establishing their nation and becoming rich and powerful again. And they had been disappointed. They were neither rich nor great. They were not even really an independent nation. So they had begun to "rob God" by bringing unfit offerings (Malachi 1:7-8) and were asking what was the use of serving God at all; they were also beginning again to put away their Hebrew wives and marry wives from the other nations.

So for the last time they were accused by the Lord, their evils pointed out, and they were warned to turn from them if they wished the Lord to protect and prosper them. They did not heed the warning. The nation continued for four hundred years after Malachi before the Lord finally came, most of the time under foreign control, but no more prophets were sent to it. And the same charges against it which Malachi makes are made by the Lord in the Gospels against the people of that later time.

But there were good people among them in Malachi's day, and Malachi's chief message was a message of encouragement and hope for them—a message which, with others of the same kind in the other Prophets, supported the good and kept them faithful throughout the four hundred years, for we know that there were good people when the Lord came who, like Simeon (Luke 2:25), were "just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel." These people are especially described in verses 16 to 18 of chapter 3, and are promised that they shall be among the Lord's special possessions or "jewels." Swedenborg says in one place that precious stones

represent "truths translucent from the love Divine," and we are told that angels love to feel that all the good they do and the wisdom they seem to have are the Lord's love and wisdom acting through them. So we may think of the Lord's jewels as angels, and we may all be angels insofar as we receive and transmit love and truth from the Lord. You remember that an "angel" is a messenger. The name *Malachi* means "my messenger."

Two messengers are spoken of in our lesson. One is the Lord, who is called "the messenger of the covenant." The word *testament* means a covenant or agreement. The Old Testament describes the working out of the covenant made through Moses that if the people would faithfully observe the laws and statutes given them at Sinai, the Lord would protect and prosper them. This covenant, as we have been learning, the nation repeatedly broke and finally completely violated. The Lord had foreseen that they would, and so again and again throughout the Old Testament we find promises that the Lord Himself would one day come into the world to establish a new covenant with the good people that should be left. The prophecies of our lesson are the last of these promises. They tell us plainly that the day of the Lord's coming was to be a terrible day for the wicked. Read verse 1 of chapter 4. Thinking of this lesson as it relates to the history of the world rather than of the individual soul, we realize that this prophecy was historically fulfilled. But we should keep in mind that these chapters have also their application to us as individuals.

The effect of the Lord's coming upon good people is described in verse 2 of chapter 4. In the Word the Lord is often likened to the sun, and we remember that in the Creation story, the appearance of the sun on the fourth day pictures the development of love to the Lord in the heart. Wings picture interior or spiritual truths, which have the power to lift our thoughts above worldly things. This is what the Lord brought to men when He came into the world, and what the good needed to enable them to distinguish between right and wrong and to overcome their evils; so the Lord brought "healing in his wings."

But when the Lord came, even the good people would need to be prepared before they could receive Him. There have been actual cases of people who with good intentions have through ignorance done something which resulted in great harm and have committed suicide in despair when they suddenly realized what their deeds had caused. People need to be shown their faults one by one and led to correct them before the deep evils in their hearts are revealed to them. That is the wise and gentle way of the Lord in dealing with each one of us, and it was the way in which he dealt with the good remnant when He came into the world.

Verse 2 of chapter 4 tells us that they shall "grow up as calves of the stall." Calves represent exterior goods. Then verse 3 says that they shall tread down the wicked, and this means that they shall begin to overcome the evils in themselves. And in verse 4 they are told to remember the law of Moses. This order is a picture of the way in which all who sincerely want to be good are reformed, first by learning to do right according to the commandments and then by fighting and overcoming the selfish desires that prompt them to do wrong. You remember that the whole wilderness journey of the Israelites was a picture of the period of reformation.

Now that the church had become completely perverted, good individuals were not able to learn from their church just what they ought to do and to be. But they were promised that the Lord would come and establish a new covenant with them and that Elijah the prophet would be sent to them first to prepare them to receive the Lord. What this promise meant and how it was fulfilled is the subject of a later lesson.

Basic Correspondences

the sun = the Lord, the divine love,
 love to the Lord

wings = spiritual truths
calves = exterior goods

Senior

The Seniors should know the general history of the return and its results and

have a clear idea of the state of the ancient Jewish Church in its last centuries and the reason why it would reject the Messiah to whose coming it nominally looked forward. More will be done later with the personal application of Malachi's last prophecy.

The word *Malachi* means "my messenger." Because it is so appropriate to the content of the book, some students have thought that it was not the name of a person at all. But we know that all the names in the Word have meanings related to the spiritual sense and were providentially given for that purpose. Every prophet is a messenger of the Lord, each with a particular message. The message of Malachi, the last of the twelve Minor Prophets, like all parts of the Word, has its deepest application with reference to the Lord's life, its secondary application to us as individuals, and its third application to the history of the Lord's church in the world, as well as its literal meaning. In general, in our Sunday school lessons we study the personal application of the Bible story, because as children and young people we must learn how the Lord wants us to live. But since this lesson marks the end of our Old Testament series and gives us the connecting links which join the Old to the New, we shall think rather of the literal story and of the internal historical application.

After seventy years of captivity in Babylon the people had been allowed and even helped by Cyrus to return to the Holy Land and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. This story is told in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. From them we learn that all the people did not return—not because they could not, but because they did not want to. And we also learn that those who came back were more interested after they arrived in reclaiming the land and rebuilding their homes than they were in completing the temple and restoring their worship, and that they easily fell back into their old evils of seeking worldly objectives and of intermarrying with the idolatrous people of the land. In these early days of the return the prophet Haggai was sent to spur them on to the completion of the temple. Zechariah followed Haggai, and finally Malachi was sent with a last warning. After Malachi, for four hundred years—until the appearance

of John the Baptist—no prophet was sent to the nation. Most of our Bibles do not contain the books grouped under the name “Apocrypha” which tell the history of this period. During the greater part of it the nation was under the control of foreign powers, and when the Gospel story opens, we find them, as you know, under the dominion of a Roman governor, although they also have their own nominal king. This is the external history.

In our chapters from Malachi we find the key to the internal states of the people in his time and during the rest of the nation’s history. Verses 5 to 15 of chapter 3 give a general picture of the evils into which the nation had already fallen, and others are described in the two preceding chapters. Notice particularly verses 14 and 15, which show that most of the people who returned from Babylon did not return because of devotion to the Lord but because they hoped to become rich and prosperous again. In other words, the motive in their worship was selfishness.

Another class of people, however, is described in verses 16 to 18 of chapter 3. You remember that all through the Bible story, as the successive churches declined, there has always been a “remnant” who remained God-fearing and faithful—even after they no longer knew the truth — out of whom a new church could be built up. This remnant continued to exist in the nation throughout the next four hundred years, as we learn from the Gospels. The shepherds at Bethlehem, Zacharias and Elisabeth, Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna could be told immediately of the Lord’s birth. In Luke 2:25, for example, we read of the aged Simeon that he was “just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel,” and when the Lord, an infant eight days old, was brought into the temple, Simeon was given to know that this was the promised “consolation,” the Messiah, and he took the Lord in his arms and spoke the beautiful words which we know as the *Nunc Dimittis*.

Malachi’s message foretells the effect which the Lord’s Advent was to have upon the evil and upon the good. The evil would reject Him and so would judge themselves. The good would receive Him gladly and submit willingly to the process of purifying which the

fire of direct contact with His divine love would begin in their lives. His coming is likened to the rising sun. The light of truth will bring joy and healing to the good, but the evil will be tormented by it because, as we read in John 3:19, they have "loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." The great majority rejected the Lord when He came.

In the good remnant, however, there were only a few when the Lord came, in whose hearts and minds there was still the innocence which could receive the Lord immediately. Most of them had been led, through the misrepresentations of their priests and leaders, into evils which would have thrown them into utter despair if the new light had come too suddenly into their darkness. So the last two verses of the Old Testament are a promise that a prophet will be sent to prepare them to receive the Lord when He comes, and Elijah is named as this prophet. The meaning and fulfillment of this prophecy will be the substance of a later lesson.

Adult

A little more has been done in the Adult notes with the personal application of the lesson than in the notes for the other classes. The teacher should study all the notes from the Junior up and be prepared to discuss whichever application seems to interest the class most. In any event, he should first make sure that the class is familiar with the historical events involved before proceeding to the meaning of the prophecies.

We may recall that in our lesson on the story of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, Korah and the two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly who were jealous of Moses and Aaron were slain by fire from the Lord as they offered their incense before the door of the tabernacle, and that this is a picture of how love from the Lord is turned into hatred in the hearts of those who seek to exalt themselves. In *Heaven and Hell*, n. 570 we read: "As infernal fire is the love of self and of the world it is also every lust of these loves, since lust is love in its continuity, for what a man loves he continually lusts after. Infernal fire is also delight, since what a man loves and lusts after he perceives, when he obtains it, to be delightful.

Man's delight of heart is of no other source. Infernal fire, therefore, is the lust and delight, that spring from these two loves as their origins. The evils flowing from these loves are contempt of others, enmity, and hostility against those who do not favor them, envy, hatred, and revenge, and from this fierceness and cruelty; and in respect to the Divine they are denial and consequent contempt, derision, and detraction of the holy things of the church; and after death, when man becomes a spirit, these evils are changed into anger and hatred against these holy things." Malachi 4:1 is one of several passages quoted in support of this interpretation.

That the people by and large were in this spiritually destructive self-love in the time of Malachi is evident from the charges made against them in the first two chapters of the book and in verses 5 to 15 of chapter 3. And that they were still in that state for the most part four hundred years later when the Lord was on earth is evident from many passages in the Gospels.

Malachi and the two Prophets whose books precede his in the Bible prophesied after the return from captivity in Babylon. Even in the time of Haggai, the first of these three, less than twenty years after the return, the people were already pursuing their own worldly affairs instead of completing the rebuilding of the temple, and were beginning again to intermarry with the idolatrous nations of the land. They refused to heed the warnings of the Lord or to learn the lessons taught by experience. So Malachi was the last prophet sent to them until the appearance of John the Baptist as the herald of the Lord. Their attitude toward their religion is well summed up in verse 14 of chapter 3: "It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?"

Yet throughout the two chapters of our lesson we see that there were good people in Malachi's time. Verse 16 of chapter 3 in its letter is a picture of the quiet drawing together of the good in times when evil forces seem to be in control, and the beautiful promise given them in verse 17 is one which every sincere worshiper of the Lord may cherish. The amazing thing is that the remnant of good

people persisted throughout the four hundred years in which there was no new voice from heaven, but we learn from the writings that when a church is being vastated, the Lord always preserves a remnant out of which a new church may be built; as we read in Isaiah 17:7: "Yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the Lord God of Israel." That during this long period the promises of the Messiah made through the Prophets were the support of this remnant we learn from many statements in the Gospels, notably from the stories of Simeon and Anna in Luke 2:25-38.

In Malachi 4:1-2 the effect which the Lord's coming would have on the evil and on the good is told in the vivid contrast of the consuming fire and the rising sun. The only ones who do not welcome the sun—either natural or spiritual—are those who have "loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." To all the good its light and warmth are welcome, and the sun of righteousness—the Lord Jesus Christ—also brings "healing in his wings." AE 283⁹ tells us that in this verse the sun of righteousness is the celestial divine and the wings of Jehovah the spiritual divine or the one is the good of love and the other truth from that good. Wings in general represent spiritual truths which have the power to lift our thoughts above the plane of worldly living to heights from which we can see life in its true proportions and relationships, and it is this higher view which enables us to cleanse our minds of many afflictions and limitations. And it is said that we shall become "as calves of the stall." The Lord's coming makes our outward affections wholesome and productive and, as verses 3 and 4 teach us, makes it possible for us to overcome our temptations and to live freely according to the commandments.

Later we shall take up the fulfillment of the prophecy in Malachi 4:5-6, the prophecy with which the Old Testament leaves us, but there are one or two things in verse 6 which we may consider here as preparation. We might note that the word commonly translated "children" in both the King James and the Revised Standard

Version is actually *sons*, and Swedenborg consistently uses the more literal translation, which is important to the spiritual interpretation, since sons represent truths. In AE 724 Swedenborg quotes this verse (using the word *sons* instead of *children*) and gives us this interpretation: "From this it may be concluded what 'turning the heart of the fathers to the sons and the heart of the sons to the fathers' signifies, namely, that it means inducing a representation of the conjunction of spiritual goods with truths and truths with goods, thus of regeneration by the Lord by means of the Word. For regeneration is the conjunction of goods with truths and of truths with goods, and it is the Lord who regenerates, and the Word that teaches."

We may perhaps understand a little of what is meant by the last words of this verse—"lest I come and smite the earth with a curse"—by thinking again of the Lord as the sun and of how dangerous it would be for a physical eye from which a cataract had just been removed to be suddenly exposed to the full sunlight. We know that one of the objects of the Lord in the Advent was "to open the blind eyes." The simple good of that day were spiritually blind, because the knowledge of the Lord's teaching in the Word had been obscured by the traditions of the elders. The full light of truth coming to them suddenly would have plunged them into despair and self-destruction. So a messenger was sent to prepare the way.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 8159²: "The temptations of those who were of the spiritual church, which they were to undergo after the Lord came into the world, and could then from the Divine Human fight for them against the hells, are meant by these words in Malachi . . . (3:1-4); clearly speaking of the Lord's coming; 'the sons of Levi' here denote those who are of the spiritual church, for by 'Levi' is signified charity or spiritual good . . . ; 'the refiner's fire' is temptation, whereby is effected purification, which is here meant by 'purifying and refining them as gold and silver'; 'the meat-offering which they shall bring to Jehovah' is faith and charity; 'the days of eternity' and 'the former

years' denote the ancient churches, and the states of worship of the Lord at that time."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. How many Minor Prophets are there? *twelve*
- J. When did the last three prophesy? *after return from Babylon*
- P. Who was the last one of all? *Malachi*
- P. What does *Malachi* mean? *my messenger*
- J. What bad things were the people doing? *disobeying the law of the tithe*
- P. What great event did Malachi foretell? *coming of the Lord*
- P. What did he say it would be like? *the sun of righteousness*
- J. How did he say it would affect the wicked? *would tread them down*
- J. How would it affect the good? *bring them healing*
- P. Who would be sent to prepare the way of the Lord? "*Elijah*"
- I. Why is the Lord's coming likened to the sunrise? *brings warmth and light*
- S. Why were no prophets sent after Malachi until John the Baptist? *church fully perverted*
- S. Why would the people need to be prepared by someone for the Lord's coming? *the full effect of His truth coming suddenly would have driven people to self-destruction*

THE LORD COMES INTO THE WORLD

Matthew 1:18-25; 2:13-23

Tell all the classes that in passing from the Old to the New Testament we are merely continuing the Bible story, but that there has been a lapse of more than four hundred years while the people settled again throughout the Holy Land and re-established their formal worship. All through the lesson stress the dependence of the letter of the New Testament upon the Old and the importance of keeping this relation in mind in our study. In all our study of the Lord's life on earth we should keep constantly before the children the thought of His dual nature—the divine from the Father within and the finite humanity from Mary which clothed it.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord had to come into the world when men had closed His access to their minds by perverting the Word.

The Lord's instruction in childhood was in the letter of the Word.

Notes for Parents

With the lessons on the rebuilding of the temple and prophecies of the Advent, we leave the Old Testament. Between four and five hundred years have elapsed since the time of that story. The people had had a troubled history during this period. They had remained in their land, but had been under the dominion of one or another alien people most of the time. The history of these years of the posterity of Judah does not form part of the Word of God because by their continued disobedience they had sacrificed the right to serve as representative of the Lord's church on earth. They were kept in the land under divine providence only because the Lord had to be born there and of a Jewish mother in order to "fulfill the Law and the Prophets."

When the Lord was born, the people had their own king, Herod, but he ruled under the control of a Roman governor, for the land was part of the Roman Empire. Herod was building a great new temple on the site of the old one and the ecclesiastical leaders made a great show of keeping the religious laws, but their only thought of the promised Messiah was that He would be a strong king who would free them from the Roman rule. And Herod, as our story for today shows us, did not want to give up his throne even to the Messiah.

The first chapter of the New Testament tells us plainly that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah—*Christ* is the Greek word—and that He was no other than God Himself come into the world—“Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.” The name *Jesus*, which was also commanded, means “Jehovah saves.”

When we read of the Lord’s being taken into Egypt, we remember immediately how Abraham went down into Egypt, how Joseph was sold there, and how Jacob and his sons were cared for there during the years of famine. And if we recall that the land of Egypt is a picture of the plane of memory-knowledge, we realize that the Lord’s going there has a deeper meaning than we might think from the letter.

The Lord came into the world to meet and overcome all the evils which the selfishness of men had brought upon them. The only way in which He could come in contact with these evils was by taking on a human nature and living as a man in the world. The soul of Jesus Christ was God, divine love itself, but through Mary He clothed Himself with a finite human mind and body full of all the tendencies to evil which had been accumulating through the ages of man’s decline.

He was born as a little baby with no knowledge, and He had to learn things just as every child does. This is pictured by the stay in Egypt. He stored His mind with memory-knowledges, especially the knowledge of the letter of the Old Testament, as we may know from His constant quotations from it. This same thought about the Lord’s human nature is brought out again in the third

chapter of Matthew, the story of the Lord's baptism.

Primary

This is the age at which to point out from the Word that Joseph was not the father of Jesus. It can be stated without explanation and will help form the child's thought of the Lord as different from anyone else, since they know that every ordinary man and woman has a human father. The Lord's instruction of Joseph in dreams and His care of the child should be emphasized. The children should learn the name *Nazareth* and the fact that the Lord grew up there.

Into what two parts is the Bible divided?

Which part have we been studying?

Now we are beginning our study of the New Testament.

What is the first book of the New Testament?

Do you remember whose birthday we celebrate at Christmas time? It is that of the Lord Himself, who came into the world on the first Christmas day. He came to show us how to live rightly, and so He had to be born as a little baby and grow up just as we do.

Where was the Lord Jesus Christ born?

Who was His mother?

Who was His father?

What was the name of Mary's husband?

In the prophecy in verse 23, what is the Lord called?

Our story for today tells us how He was taken care of when He was a baby. You remember how the Wise Men of the East saw a star and knew that it meant that the Lord had been born. They followed it all the way to the Holy Land and asked king Herod where the new king of the Jews was. This made king Herod very angry, but he pretended to be pleased, because he wanted to find out through the Wise Men where to go to kill the newborn king. His scribes told him that the Old Testament said that the Lord was to be born in Bethlehem. So Herod told the Wise Men to go to Bethlehem and if they found the Lord, to come back and tell him. They did find the Lord and gave Him the gifts they had brought—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—but they were warned in a dream

not to go back to Herod; so they went home by another way.

When Herod could not find the Lord, what did he do?

How did Joseph know when it was time to take the Lord back to the Holy Land?

Where in the Holy Land did they go?

Nazareth was in the part of the land called Galilee.

The Lord grew up in Galilee.

Junior

The lesson gives opportunity for looking up pertinent references in the Old Testament and making the connection with the last lesson by the mention of Herod's temple. The children should also study a map and get the new division of the land clearly in mind. Call attention to the statement in their notes of the people who lived in each of the three divisions.

Into what two main parts is the Bible divided?

Which part have we been studying?

What was our last lesson about?

With what great event does the New Testament begin?

Where did the Wise Men come from?

How did they know when the Lord was born?

How did they find out just where to go in the Holy Land?

What gifts did they bring to the Lord?

Why did they not go back to Herod?

Our lesson for today tells us more about the Lord Himself, as well as about the flight into Egypt. Joseph was the husband of Mary, but he was not the Lord's father.

From the first chapter of Matthew who do we learn that Jesus was?

How was this revealed to Joseph?

The prophecy quoted in Matthew 1:23 is found in Isaiah 7:14.

By what name is the Lord called in this prophecy?

What does *Emmanuel* mean?

The name *Jesus* means "Jehovah saves," and *Christ* means "the anointed one." *Christ* is a Greek word, and the Hebrew word with the same meaning is *Messiah*. We need to know these names of the Lord and what they mean.

But today we shall think especially of the events which followed

the departure of the Wise Men. Again the Lord spoke to Joseph in a dream.

What did He tell him to do?

Why?

At this time Herod was king in Judea, although the whole country was subject to the Roman Empire. It had not only to pay tribute to Rome, but to submit to the actual rule of the Roman governor stationed in it. Herod, like most of the Jewish leaders at this time, pretended to be faithful to the true God, Jehovah. He began the building of a great new temple on the site of the former temples of Solomon and Zerubbabel. It was finished by his successors and was the largest temple of all. But Herod was not a good man. He was really building the temple for the sake of his own glory.

The people knew from many prophecies in the Old Testament that someday the Messiah would come. They thought that He would come as a great king who would free them from the power of their enemies and make them the foremost nation in the world. This was what was in Herod's mind when he told the Wise Men to come back and tell him when they had found the Lord. He pretended that he wanted to know so that he could go and worship the new king, but he was not telling the truth, as our lesson for today shows us. In spite of his profession of faithfulness to the religion of Judaism, all he was really interested in was keeping his own position as their king.

What did he do when the Wise Men did not come back?

What people do you remember who went down into Egypt long before?

Why did they go there?

Egypt, because of its unusual climate, was the granary of the ancient world, to which many nations went to get food when they did not have enough in their own lands. This is a picture of something. You know our minds have to have food, too. Whenever we try to advance, we feel the need of more knowledge. So Egypt in the Word pictures the plane of the mind in which knowledge can be stored up—the plane of memory-knowledge. Memory-knowledge

is the kind of knowledge with which we store our memories in school and in Sunday school. The Lord, when He was a baby, was taken down into Egypt not only to save Him from Herod but also to picture the fact that when He came into the world He had to learn just as we do. The knowledge with which He filled His mind was especially the letter of the Old Testament. As you read His life in the Gospels, notice how constantly He quotes from it.

By the time the Lord came into the world, four hundred or more years after the close of the Old Testament story, the descendants of the people of Judah who had returned from Babylon had become numerous and were scattered all through the Holy Land, but there were also many foreigners there, called *Gentiles*, which means people of a religion other than the prevailing one. There were Roman soldiers who kept the land in order for the Roman Emperor. There were Samaritans, the descendants of the people brought in by the Assyrians to take the place of the people of Israel. Then there were many Greeks and people from other countries, especially in the northern part of the land. At this time the Holy Land was divided into three territories, Judea in the south, Samaria in the center, and Galilee in the north. Look at these divisions on a map.

In which division are Jerusalem and Bethlehem?

In which division is Nazareth?

How did Joseph know when it was safe to go back from Egypt?

Why did he not go back to Bethlehem?

In our two chapters how often does the Lord speak to Joseph "in a dream"?

The Lord grew up in Nazareth, living there nearly thirty years, and during the last three years of His earthly life He made His home in Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, only going down to Jerusalem for the great feasts and finally for the last week of His life on earth. So there are four places you want especially to remember in connection with the Lord's life: Bethlehem, Nazareth, Capernaum, and Jerusalem.

Intermediate

The diety of the Lord should be stressed with this class. The rest of the discussion may well be on the meaning of Egypt and of the Lord's being sent there.

In our lessons so far we have studied the spiritual history of the human race from its creation through the time of the return of Judah from captivity. Recall the first verse of the Bible and its meaning. It was necessary that man should have both a spiritual and a natural plane in his soul and also that he should be free to choose to make either one first in his life. But he was told by the Lord from the beginning that to put the natural plane first would bring him only unhappiness. The stories we have studied have shown us that men again and again disregarded the Lord's warnings and chose to trust in their natural senses, until they gradually lost all consciousness of the inner and higher plane of life and in time could not understand anything of genuine spiritual truth and could be guided by the Lord only through fear of punishment and hope of reward in this world. The time at last came when even worldly fear and hope were not strong enough to hold them in the worship of the Lord. The very Scriptures themselves were used by the few who could read them—the scribes and Pharisees—to deceive and oppress the ignorant mass of the people. There were still many people in the world who wanted to do right, to believe in God and know about Him, a few among the Jews and many more among the Gentiles, but there was no longer any way by which they could learn the truth. The heavenly possibilities with which man had been created were no longer even known, and the whole human race was in immediate danger of losing all connection with God and so destroying itself. The Lord had to reach men in a new way. He had to come all the way down where they were and teach them the truth by living it out before their eyes: He had to prove to them His power over all their troubles and temptations and to give them a living example of what true human life is.

In the Old Testament there are many prophecies of His coming. Two are quoted in the first two chapters of Matthew (1:23 and

2:6). The people knew these prophecies and theoretically were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. But actually few, except the suffering and downtrodden poor, really wanted the Messiah to come. The rulers—like Herod—and the scribes and Pharisees were busy getting all they could out of the people, and used their religion as a cloak and as a means of obtaining honor for themselves. Herod was building the greatest of the temples, but we know from many of the Lord's statements how corrupt the worship there was. Herod's own act in our chapter for today shows the hollowness of the religion. Compare 2:7-8 with 2:16. Herod himself as king of Judea at this time represents selfishness ruling in the heart. Selfishness always resists the coming of truth into the mind, for fear the truth will expose and condemn it. That the Lord was really the Messiah, the "anointed one"—the Greek word for *Messiah* is *Christ*—is so clearly taught in chapter 1 that no one who claims to be a Christian should question it. Joseph was not the Lord's father. The name *Jesus* means "Jehovah saves." Jesus Christ was the Savior, the promised Messiah, Emmanuel, "God with us," God Himself come into the world in a human form.

Four times in the two chapters Joseph is instructed by the Lord "in a dream." We remember how many times in the Old Testament instruction is given by means of dreams. There are many other things which link these first two chapters of the New Testament with the Old and make the Bible a continuous story. There are the genealogy at the beginning, the quoted prophecies, and finally the Lord's being taken into Egypt. We have thought of Egypt many times before. The early history of the Hebrews was full of occasions for going down into Egypt. Egypt, the granary of the ancient world, pictures the plane of memory-knowledge. We are "in Egypt" when we are in school and Sunday school, acquiring the knowledges necessary for our life. The Lord chose to be born as a helpless, ignorant baby, as we are, and He had to acquire knowledge just as we do, although He learned much more rapidly and perfectly than any ordinary child can. And especially He learned the letter of the Old Testament, learned all of it so perfectly that the Divine within

Him could flow into it at every point and His whole life could be a fulfillment of Scripture. We shall see how constantly He quoted from it. It was to picture this learning period of the Lord's life that He was taken into Egypt in His infancy.

In the Lord's time the Holy Land was divided into three main sections: Judea in the south, which represents the will or inmost plane of life; Samaria in the center, which represents the thought life; and Galilee in the north, which represents the outward conduct. The Lord was born in Bethlehem of Judea, as we all are born in innocence and trust. He was taken into Egypt, the learning state. And then He was brought back to the Holy Land, but not to Bethlehem. He was to grow up and live for nearly thirty years in Nazareth of Galilee, as we all must develop orderly external conduct before we are ready for inner regeneration. During His ministry—the three last years of His earthly life—the Lord made His home in Capernaum of Galilee, but went down to Jerusalem in Judea regularly for the great feasts, passing through Samaria both going and coming. This is a picture of our own life when it is orderly. We live for the most part on the plane of outward conduct, but we must go regularly to the Lord in His Word for instruction and inspiration, and the connection between the two planes is made in our thinking.

Basic Correspondences

Judea = the plane of will or motive
in the person of the church

Samaria = the plane of thought

Galilee = the plane of outward conduct

Herod = selfishness ruling in the heart

Senior

The general discussion of the Lord's coming into the world, with its setting and its timing, is the important thing for the Seniors. Those who will soon be going to college, where they will be exposed to the "findings" of Bible students, need to have a clear understanding of the reasons for the statements of the letter of the Word and particularly of the Lord's statement that He came

to "fulfill" the Law and the Prophets. They should know the difference between the New Church view of the Bible and that outside the New Church and should see clearly the fallacy of approaching the study of the Bible as if it were merely a human production.

The Lord knew from the beginning that He would ultimately have to come into the world. The first prophecy of His coming is found in Genesis 3:15. It is natural to ask, "Why then did He not come sooner? Why did He let people get so far away from Him and suffer so much before He came to save them?" The answer is that His purpose in coming was to make a way for Himself to reach them in their very lowest possible states. If He had come before men had gotten as far away from Him as possible, there would still have been depths which His humanity had not experienced and through which He had not shown men the way—states which His transforming power could not reach. Read Psalm 139 carefully with this thought in mind. It is a prophecy also of the Lord's work in the humanity which He assumed. Think what it means to human beings to be able to say, "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there." Because the Lord waited to take on our nature at its very lowest, there is no state into which we can fall which the Lord has not passed through victoriously, showing us the way out if only we will follow Him. This is why it was night when the Lord was born, the darkest night spiritually that the world ever had or ever could pass through.

But why did the Lord choose to be born among the ancient Hebrews? The answer to this question is twofold. The ancient Hebrews were themselves, we are told, the furthest from God of any people on earth because, having the means of salvation in the Scriptures, they refused to use them. Remember how often the Lord speaks of the Gentiles as better off spiritually. In choosing to be born among the ancient Hebrews the Lord fulfilled His purpose of assuming humanity at its lowest. But there was another reason also. The Lord in every detail fulfilled the Scriptures. The Old Testament Scriptures, through correspondence, taught of his life.

When the time came for Him to live out before men the inner secret life of the Old Testament Scriptures, He had to make use of the true correspondential background. Again only those who knew of Him through Scripture prophecy could be prepared to recognize and accept Him. Although the Christian Church was to have its growth and development among the Gentiles, its beginning had to be from the good "remnant" of the previous dispensation, the ancient Jewish Church. We have seen that this had been true of each of the previous churches. Both in fulfillment of prophecy and because of its correspondence, the Lord had to be born in Bethlehem of Judea, the city of David.

His coming was the turning point in the world's history. The fact that our calendar dates back and forward from the Advent of the Lord is an effect from this cause. Up to that time humanity had been developing its various powers, opening the planes of life from highest to lowest, going further and further away from the celestial state. With the coming of the Lord the slow process of regeneration began. With the new power which the Lord's glorification set at work in the world—through His Holy Spirit—mankind is making its way back toward the divine image into which it was created. Each one of us has a part in this process, for only through individual regeneration can the race regenerate. If we choose to study and follow the Lord's example, we advance the spiritual development of the human race; if we choose to follow our own natural inclinations, we retard it.

The two chapters of our lesson are also assigned as the basis of our Christmas lesson from Matthew, and the emphasis falls naturally on the visit of the Wise Men. So it is good to think more today of the other sections of the chapters, to notice how closely the whole account is tied to the Old Testament by the genealogy at the start, the Old Testament passages quoted, and the story of the Lord's being taken into Egypt, which pictures the fact that the Lord had to acquire knowledges in His external memory just as we do. Chapter 1 leaves no room for doubt that the Lord was actually born of a virgin—that Joseph was not His father—and that Jesus

was the promised Messiah, Emmanuel, God with us. The state of the church at the time is pictured by Herod's hypocrisy: Herod was in the process of building the greatest of the temples ostensibly to the honor of Jehovah, the God he actually tried to destroy. It is not by chance that the Gospel of Matthew became the first book of the New Testament. The whole Scripture is a continued story, written by the same author. The Old and the New Testaments are inextricably interwoven. The Lord came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. If we do not know the Law and the Prophets, we cannot understand the Gospels; and if we do not recognize the Lord's life as the fulfillment of prophecy, we do not really recognize the Lord.

Adult

The importance of the first chapter of Matthew to our thought about the verbal inspiration of the Word should be stressed. Discussion may center about what is involved in the dual nature of the Lord while He was on earth. It is this knowledge, revealed by the Lord in His Second Coming, which enables us to recognize and combat the fallacies inherent in the tripersonal concept of God.

Our first chapter emphasizes the virgin birth of the Lord. Doubt and denial of the virgin birth are based wholly upon unwillingness to believe. The letter of Scripture leaves us no possible excuse for questioning the fact. The Lord was born in a miraculous manner without a natural father. If we accept His later claims to divinity, we can see that His birth could not have been like that of any finite man. We are limited by our inheritance from our parents. There are some things which each of us cannot learn to do, no matter how hard we try. There are some temptations with which we have to fight all our lives inwardly, however we may learn to control their outward expression. Swedenborg explains this by telling us that we inherit the form of our internal mind from our father, the form of our external mind from our mother. Thus evil tendencies which we inherit from the mother's side may be wholly conquered and put off, but those which we inherit from the father's side may

only be controlled.* If we make the effort here to control them, when we get into the other life the Lord will hold them in subjection for us so that they no longer trouble us, but they remain as our individual limitations to eternity. If the Lord had had a natural father, His soul would have been finited just as ours are. He would not have been able to overcome all temptations; He would not have had infinite possibilities of development; He could never have made His humanity divine. The angel told Joseph that the child which Mary was to bear was conceived "of the Holy Ghost." That is, it was the divine life force itself which caused in Mary the beginning of the external form which was the Holy Babe of Bethlehem. The father of the child was the infinite God. The internal mind of the child was therefore infinite in its possibilities of development; but the external mind as well as the body was from Mary, and through her contained all the accumulated evil tendencies of humanity from the beginning of the world. Each of us has an internal and an external mind; we have all had experience of the struggle between what we call our higher and our lower natures. Imagine what struggle lay before the babe in whom the internal was the expression of the divine itself and the external contained all the accumulated forces of the hells!

The three names of the Lord mentioned in our lesson all express the fact of the Incarnation: *Emmanuel*, meaning "God with us"; *Jesus*, meaning "Jehovah saves"; *Christ* (*Messiah* in the Hebrew), meaning "the anointed one," the savior promised from the beginning. The more we study this first chapter of the New Testament in the light of the knowledge given the world at the Second Coming the more wonderful it seems in its testimony not only to the deity of the Lord but to the inspiration of both Old and New Testament Scripture. Matthew indeed penned it, but he did not make it up. No mere man could have composed twenty-five verses which so intricately and convincingly sum up the Old Testament and proclaim its fulfillment in the New.

*See editorial Appendix at end of this volume.

Egypt, the land symbolizing natural knowledges, is familiar to us from our lessons in the Old Testament from Abram's sojourn there and from the story of Joseph and the long bondage of the Hebrews there. Now the Lord is taken there to escape the wrath of Herod. When Abram went into Egypt it was because of famine, and we saw that the famine represented lack of knowledge of the Lord's truth, and that going into Egypt pictured spending time in learning. The Lord's going into Egypt pictures a learning period in His life. Swedenborg says, "The Lord was instructed like any other man, but by virtue of His Divine He received all things more intelligently and wisely than anyone else." (AE 654¹⁹). William Bruce, in his *Commentary on Matthew*, puts the reason for this very clearly: "The Divine was in the human, in the person of Christ, as the soul is in the body in the person of man. The soul does not inspire the body—or rather the external man, which includes the body—with knowledge, but only gives him the faculty of acquiring it. Nor does the soul manifest its powers in and through the body till the body, or rather the external man, is prepared by growth 'in wisdom and in stature,' to become a suitable instrument for its use. Reason and liberty are faculties of the soul; but without knowledge, rationality would not be able to judge nor liberty to choose." So the Lord, when He was a child, had to acquire knowledge by the use of His senses just as we do. Especially He had to be taught and to store in His external memory the letter of Scripture, for this was the measure to which He was to grow up. We learn parts of Scripture, and our finite reason acting upon our knowledge enables us partially to understand their meaning, and our finite will leads us to choose partially to live up to what we understand. The Lord learned all of Scripture, His infinite wisdom enabled Him to understand all its meaning, and His infinite love chose to live up to all of that wisdom. Even the learning process was hastened and perfected by the perfect internal within the external.

There is also perhaps a suggestion for us in the fact that Joseph was directed by revelation from heaven in his care of the child. There has been much idle speculation as to the Lord's training and

pursuits during the long period in Nazareth, and many questions have been raised—as indeed they were raised in His own day (John 7:15)—as to how far His education was determined by the status and condition of Joseph. But we see that in the letter itself we have the assurance that Joseph as well as Mary knew that the child was extraordinary, and that Joseph was not the one who determined what should be done with Him. So even the letter suggests to us that the Lord's education was not necessarily dependent upon Joseph's knowledge and judgment; and Swedenborg tells us that “in His childhood the Lord did not will to imbue Himself with any other knowledges than those of the Word” (AC 1461). The Lord's stay in Egypt therefore really pictures the fact that in His childhood He learned the letter of Scripture.

Herod, king of the Jews at this point in their history, pictures selfishness as a ruling principle in the life. As soon as we really recognize the Lord as God and determine to follow Him, all the selfishness in our nature is roused to an effort to change our determination. This is pictured by Herod's wrath and his attempt to destroy the Lord. He did destroy all the children in Bethlehem under two years of age—this means all that remained of innocence and goodness in the church which might have united it to the Lord. Little children represent innocence; the number two, the conjunction of good and truth; and Bethlehem, the connecting link between heaven and earth.

The three divisions of the Holy Land in the Lord's time picture the three planes in our lives. Judea, in which were Jerusalem and the temple and in which the Lord was born and to which He returned for the closing scenes of His earthly life, pictures the celestial or will plane. Galilee, in which He spent all the early years of His life and where most of the work of His ministry was done, pictures the natural plane, the plane of act or of external conduct. Samaria, which connects the two and through which He passed again and again as He went to and fro between Judea and Galilee, pictures the spiritual or thought plane. The greater part of our life must be given to the problems of external daily conduct, but we

go up to Jerusalem regularly for worship and instruction and inspiration, and between the two planes we too "must needs pass through Samaria." We must think in order to worship the Lord and to understand His Word, and we must think in order to apply what we learn of His will in our daily life.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 654¹⁹: "The Lord Himself when He was an infant was carried down into Egypt . . . This, again, signifies the first instruction of the Lord, for the Lord was instructed like any other man, but by virtue of His Divine He received all things more intelligently and wisely than anyone else. This departure into Egypt was merely a representative of instruction; for as all the representatives of the Jewish and Israelitish church looked to Him, so He represented them in Himself and completely observed them, thus fulfilling all things of the law. Since representatives were the outmosts of heaven and the church, and all prior things, which are things rational, spiritual, and celestial, enter into outmosts and are in them, so through these the Lord was in outmosts; and as all strength is in outmosts, so it was from firsts through outmosts that He subjugated all the hells, and reduced to order all things in the heavens. This is why the whole life of the Lord in the world was representative, even all things related in the Gospels respecting His passion, which represented what the church then was in contrariety to the Divine and to all the goods and truths of heaven and the church."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Into what two main parts is the Bible divided? *Old, New Testament*
- P. Which part have we been studying? *Old Testament*
- J. With the history of what nation is the Old Testament in its letter principally concerned? *the Hebrew nation*
- P. How many tribes of the Israelites were there? *twelve*
- J. In what two divisions of the land were they finally settled? *Israel, Judah*
- J. What happened to the people of the division called Israel? *exiled by Assyria*
- J. What nation took the people of Judah captive? *Babylon*
- J. How long were they held in Babylon? *seventy years*
- I. Why was it necessary that some of them come back to the Holy Land? *re-establish Judaism*
- J. What did they rebuild? *the temple*

- J. Into what three parts is the Holy Land divided in the time of the New Testament? *Galilee, Samaria, Judea*
- J. With what great event does the New Testament story begin? *birth of the Lord*
- P. Where was the Lord Jesus born? *Bethlehem*
- P. Who was His mother? *Mary*
- P. Who was His father? *God*
- P. What was the name of Mary's husband? *Joseph*
- P. In Joseph's dream, what did the Lord tell him the baby would be called? *Jesus*
- J. Who was king in Judea at this time? *Herod*
- P. After the baby was born, what did God tell Joseph in a dream? *flee to Egypt*
- J. Why did Herod want to destroy the Lord? *fear for his throne*
- J. How did he try to do it? *killed boy babies at Bethlehem*
- J. When was Joseph told it was safe to bring Jesus back? *after Herod's death*
- P. Where did they go to live? *Nazareth*
- I. What is pictured by the Lord's going down into Egypt? *his learning of Scripture*
- S. Why did the Lord have to be born in the Holy Land and of a Jewish mother? *to be in a true correspondential setting and in order to take on the appropriate maternal heredity*

THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN

Matthew 2

This is the first of our *special* lessons. In this Christmas lesson, in all classes except the Primary, it should be pointed out that the number and names of the Wise Men are not given in the Word. Tradition says there were three—possibly because of the three gifts—and gives them the names *Gasper, Melchior, Balthazar*, and many Christmas pictures, pageants, and stories are based on these traditions. But the children should know from the start what is Scripture and what is tradition, as the confusion of the two is hard to correct later.

Doctrinal Points

The gifts we should bring to the Lord are our love, our faith, and our obedience to His Word.

The Lord came into the world in the fullness of time [plenitudo temporis] when there was no longer any good, and consequently there was no truth.

Notes for Parents

Parents do a great deal for their children at Christmas time. They often make real personal sacrifices or sit up late at night working in order to have gifts and a tree and a feast to make the day a happy one. But there is one gift they sometimes deny their children which is the most important gift of all, and that is a knowledge of the meaning and holiness of Christmas.

On the first Christmas Day the Lord gave to all of us the greatest and richest gift ever given—Himself. He “bowed the heavens and came down for our salvation.” And all too often we do not even think to thank Him for this gift on His birthday or to be sure our children know of it.

And there are gifts we should bring to Him on His birthday. The

Wise Men from the East brought Him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These were all valuable things, but it was not for their intrinsic value that they were given. The Wise Men knew what these three gifts signified, just as they knew what the star meant when it appeared to them. They were of those who had cherished the knowledges which had come down to them by tradition from ancient times when men lived close to the Lord and knew what everything in His creation meant.

Everyone knows that gold is symbolic of love. Love is one of the things we should give the Lord. Frankincense is the offering of our minds, our thoughts, our trust, our faith. And myrrh—a bitter resin—pictures obedience in our conduct, which is not always easy, but is a very necessary gift if we are to be true followers of the Lord.

Sometimes we start our lives very far from the Lord, but if we try to do as well as we know how, wishing always to know more of the right way, the little truth we have will be like the star leading us always closer to the Lord. Sometimes we are like the shepherds, living in the Holy Land itself close to Bethlehem, brought up in the church and taught by our parents in the right way. The shepherds, you remember, saw a great light. It was the same light which was a star to the far-off Wise Men. The shepherds had only a short way to go to find the Lord, while the Wise Men had a long journey. But they all found Him. The condition of finding the Lord is always the same—the desire to be shown how to live good lives.

Let us today be wise like the Wise Men of old. If our minds are open to receive truth from the Lord's Word, we shall see the star and be led to the Lord, and when we find Him, we shall lay our gifts at His feet: the gold of our love, the frankincense of our faith and trust, and the strong myrrh of obedience.

Primary

This beautiful story presents no problems for this age group. The children may want to know what frankincense and myrrh are, and some of the older

ones may ask about the reality of the star. The teacher needs to be familiar with the facts given in the notes for the older classes.

What day have you been looking forward to for weeks? You know that your parents and friends will give you presents. Perhaps you are giving some presents yourself. But I wonder if you know why we have Christmas Day and why we give each other presents on that day. Christmas is someone's birthday. It is the day on which the Lord Himself was born into the world.

We have learned that in the beginning people were good, but little by little they chose to disobey the Lord and to follow their own ways instead of His. Finally even people who wanted to do right did not know what was really right.

So the Lord Himself had to come into the world to show them the way.

The New Testament tells about the Lord's life on earth.

Where was the Lord born?

Who came from the East to find Him?

How did they know He had come?

People had known almost from the beginning of things that He would come sometime, because He had told them He would. In our Bible, in the Old Testament from which most of our lessons have been taken so far, there are many "prophecies" or foretellings of His coming. But even before our Bible was written, there was another Bible called the *Ancient Word*. That Bible was lost a long, long time ago, but people all over the world remembered and treasured some of the things it said; and in the country far to the east of the Holy Land—the country Balaam came from—there were people who especially loved and kept all that was remembered of it. One of its prophecies was that when the Lord came into the world, a star would appear. So wise and good people who wanted to know and worship the Lord were always watching for the star.

The Wise Men came from the same country from which Balaam had come long before.

Where did the Wise Men go first?

How did the priests and scribes know where to send them to find the Lord?

What led the Wise Men to the right house?

What gifts did they bring to the Lord?

What was the baby's mother's name?

What was her husband's name?

When you grow older, you will understand why Joseph was not the Lord's father.

Why did the Wise Men not go back to Herod?

What did the Lord tell Joseph in a dream?

Where did Joseph take Mary and Jesus?

How long did they stay there?

The three gifts the Lord wants from us are our love, our trust, and our obedience.

Junior

These children will be quite familiar with the story and should have an opportunity to tell it. Then they should look up the Bible references mentioned in their notes and read the information given in their notes also. The teacher should read the Intermediate notes as preparation for answering questions about the star.

Whose birth do we celebrate this week?

About how long ago was He born into the world?

Where do we learn about His birth and life in the world?

What are the two parts of the Bible?

In the beginning men were not in evils but they were free to choose to look to the Lord for guidance or to look to themselves; as they chose the selfish way, they gradually became evil. Their selfishness closed their minds to the truth so that finally even those who still wanted to be good did not know how. When this time came, the Lord had to come into the world Himself to show men how to live. He knew from the beginning that this would happen. The first prophecy of His coming is found in Genesis 3:15. The Old Testament is the story of the gradual decline of the human race. The New Testament is the story of the turning of the tide by the Lord so that men could find their way back to Him. He has given us four versions of this story, called the Gospels, each written through a different man. The word *Gospel* means "good news." The Lord's life is good news for all who want to be good. Only those who do not want to give up their selfish ways are not willing to welcome the Lord.

Where was the Lord born?

Bethlehem means “house of bread.” Two other famous people in the Bible were born there, Benjamin and David. We learn from the Gospel of Luke that the Lord was born in Bethlehem because He chose to be born in a family who were descendants of David, but there was another reason, too. The Lord came to give men the food they need to nourish their souls. He called Himself “the bread of life.” This means that we must take goodness from Him into our souls just as we take good food into our bodies. Think of this when you pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

When the Lord was born, who came looking for Him?

Where did they come from?

How did they know He had been born?

Read Numbers 24:15-19. The prophecy in verse 17 was part of the Ancient Word, which had been preserved in the eastern country where the Wise Men lived. Balaam came from that same country, but he was a selfish man who used his knowledge from the Ancient Word to work magic, whereas the Wise Men were good men who wanted to welcome and to worship the Lord. All through the years good men in that eastern country had been watching for the star.

Where did the Wise Men go first?

Who was king in Jerusalem at that time?

How did Herod find out where to send them?

The scribes were those who could read and write and spent their lives reading and copying the Old Testament. The prophecy they quoted is found in Micah 5:2.

How did the Wise Men find the house where the Lord was?

What gifts did they give Him?

Gold, frankincense, and myrrh are symbols of love, faith, and obedience, gifts we should all bring to the Lord. Because the Wise Men brought gifts on that first Christmas Day, it has become the custom to give gifts at Christmas time. But when we give and receive our Christmas presents, we should always remember that the Lord has given us the greatest gift of all, the gift of Himself.

Why didn't the Wise Men go back to Herod?
 Why had Herod wanted to know where the Lord was?
 What did the angel of the Lord tell Joseph to do?
 Do you remember any people in the Old Testament who went down into Egypt?
 Why do you think Herod wanted to kill the Lord?
 What terrible crime did Herod commit?
 Where did Joseph take the Lord to live when they returned from Egypt?



Frankincense

Frankincense: "A vegetable resin, brittle, glittering, and of a bitter taste used for the purpose of sacrificial fumigation (Exodus 30:34-36). It was called *frank* because of the freeness with which, when burned, it gives forth its odor. It burns for a long time, with a steady flame. It is obtained by successive incisions in the bark of a tree called *Arbor thuris*. The first incision yields the purest and whitest resin, while the product of the after incisions is spotted with yellow, and loses its whiteness altogether as it becomes old. The Hebrews imported their frankincense from Arabia." (*Bible Dictionary*)

Myrrh: "This substance is mentioned in Exodus 30:23 as one of the ingredients of the 'oil of holy ointment' . . . Myrrh was also used for embalming. The *Balsamodendron Myrrha*, which produces the myrrh of commerce, has a wood and bark which emit a strong odor; the gum which exudes from the bark is at first oily, but becomes hard by exposure to air. This myrrh is in small, yellowish or white globules or tears. The tree is small, with a stunted trunk." (*Bible Dictionary*)



Myrrh

Intermediate

The lesson should be centered about the reason why the Lord had to come into the world and the nature of the three gifts which we should bring to Him. Connection should be made with the story of Balaam, pointing out the survival of knowledges from the Ancient Word in the eastern country.

The study of the Old Testament shows clearly how the human race declined spiritually when once men began to look to self instead of to the Lord. Their minds became gradually closed to truth. When we are bent on having our own way, we will not see the truth. From the time of Moses, people in the world had the Scriptures—at least the Book of the Law—but they did not want to know what it really meant. As time went on they built up ways of evading the Law; and because these were also written in books by their learned men and handed down from one generation to another, they came to regard them as holy also. The Lord said they had “made the commandment of God of none effect” by their tradition. So by the time the New Testament story began, even people who wanted to be good could no longer find out what was really right. Evil was becoming stronger than good not only in this world but even in the spiritual world, because so many evil people were going there. The Lord had to come into the world Himself to show men how to live and to restore the balance in the spiritual world by fighting and overcoming the forces of the hells. The only way in which He could do this was by taking on a body and mind like ours, for evil could not come near Him as He was in Himself. Mary was chosen as the human mother through whom the human body and mind were formed and born into the world. But we must always remember that Jesus had no human father—His father was almighty God.

There are two familiar stories about the Lord’s birth, this one in Matthew and the one in Luke about the shepherds. Everyone could not be told about the Lord’s birth. The indifferent did not care, and the wicked would have destroyed Him. But the simple good and the truly wise could be told because they would welcome Him. The shepherds and the Wise Men represent these two classes.

The Wise Men came from the East guided by a star. They belonged to a good remnant of the Ancient Church who had cherished the prophecies of the Ancient Word. Balaam's prophecy (Numbers 24:17) speaks of a star. We are not to think that it was a material star—it behaved as no material star possibly could—but that it was a light from the spiritual world. Stars represent knowledges of heavenly things. The prophecy was such a star, and when it was fulfilled, the spiritual eyes of those who had cherished it could be opened to see it as a star, a guiding light. You remember that the shepherds saw a great light. It was the same light. There is no record that anyone else saw it except the Wise Men and the shepherds.

The gifts which the Wise Men brought—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—are symbols of love, faith, and obedience, the gifts which all who are truly wise bring to the Lord. These gifts to the Lord are what we should have in mind as we give and receive gifts at Christmas. The Lord gave Himself to us that first Christmas, and if we have His unselfish love in our hearts, our happiness at Christmas time will be in what we can do to make others happy rather than in what we receive ourselves. But we must not forget that being grateful to others for what they do for us is one of the ways in which we can make them happy.

We remember that Egypt pictures memory-knowledge. The Lord had to pass through a childhood like ours and acquire memory-knowledges. He even had to learn the letter of the Word just as we do, for He had to make the body and mind He had taken on capable of receiving and expressing the divine life which was within Him. It was in order to picture this that He was taken into Egypt right after He was born.

We note that both the Wise Men and Joseph were instructed "in a dream." Sleep is the time when our worldly thoughts and cares are put aside and so the Lord can be closer to us than when we are awake. In the Word many people were taught in dreams and visions. The Lord seldom teaches people in that way now, but He does do much for our souls as well as for our bodies while we are asleep. So spiritually as well as physically we need a sufficient

amount of sleep, and we should be careful not to fall into the bad habit of sitting up late when we know we have to get up early the next morning.

The *Sower* gives us an interesting thought about our story for today: "The story brings into contrast two kings: King Herod ruling in Jerusalem, and the new-born King of the Jews. The Lord was King in the power of the Divine truth and love which He brought into the world. King Herod stands for the power of falsity and evil which held dominion in men's hearts. Well might Herod be troubled at the mention of the new King, as the devils often cried out at the presence of the Lord."

"We seek the Lord as King and acknowledge Him as King especially when we learn His truth and allow it to order and rule our lives. Those who are seeking the Lord's truth are also spiritually wise men. The little knowledge that they have is their star; they follow it joyfully, and it will surely bring them to the Lord."

Basic Correspondences

gold = love

frankincense = faith

myrrh = obedience

Herod = falsity ruling in the mind

Senior

The emphasis here should be on the meaning of the Lord's coming and on our responsibility as Christians to learn about His life and follow His example. The correspondence of the shepherds and Wise Men in us should be noted and the point made that the Lord cannot come into our hearts and minds if they are full of self-will and self-esteem.

We have followed in the Old Testament the story of the decline of the human race from their first state of childlike trust and obedience to the state in which they were far from the Lord in their hearts and minds and could be brought to obey Him only through hope of reward and fear of punishment. As the centuries passed the people more and more came to evade the Law as it had

been given them, covering it up with traditions of their own making, so that at the time when the Lord came into the world even those who wished to obey the Lord could not distinguish between the Law of the Lord and the accumulated tradition. As the Lord told the Pharisees, they made the commandments of no effect, "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:1-9). It was for this reason that the Lord had to come into the world to show men the true way of life and to overcome the powers of darkness which were becoming too strong for men to resist.

The Lord was born in the nighttime to picture the spiritual darkness into which the world had come. It was a time of materialism, of confusion, and of fear. Our own times are strikingly similar, but we have the light of life by which all who wish to follow the Lord may be guided. Christmas should mean something new to us every time we celebrate it, because the conditions around us change from year to year and we ourselves change, and in every state of the world and of our individual lives we need to be reminded that the Lord Himself bowed the heavens and came down for our salvation and that He calls us to trust in Him.

The Wise Men saw the Lord's star in the east and came to worship Him. We know that stars represent knowledges of heavenly things, and Swedenborg tells us that when angels in the higher heavens are talking about heavenly truths, those in the lower heavens often see these conversations as stars in their sky (see AR 65, AE 402, TCR 160). The star which the Wise Men saw was such a spiritual light. Their spiritual eyes were opened by the Lord to see it because they had cherished the knowledges which had come down to them from the Ancient Word. Balaam, who spoke the prophecy of the star in Numbers 24:17, was from the same country as the Wise Men. We, if we are truly wise, will recognize and follow the same star. The Lord Himself is the light of the world, and the only hope for the peace and happiness of the world or of us as individuals is to walk in that light.

The Wise Men brought gifts to the Lord: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These represent the gifts which each of us will bring, if he

is wise: love, faith, and obedience. If we love the Lord, we shall put His worship and His service first in our lives, trying to make ourselves channels through which His love can work in the world. If we have faith in Him, we shall not be afraid or discouraged no matter what trials and hardships come to us and no matter how threatening the world situation seems. If we obey Him, we shall put the welfare of others before our own and not spend our lives in self-seeking. These are the gifts we should offer Him on His birthday in return for the great gift of Himself which He gave us on that day.

And He did not give it once in the dim past only. He gives it to us every day. He is in the world now and always with power to save. Every time we go to the Word for knowledge of how to live, we are following the star, and we shall always find the Lord in the Word. *Bethlehem* means "house of bread," and the Lord later called Himself the "bread of life."

It may help us, too, to think of the role played by Herod in our story. Herod represents all the power of falsity and evil which seeks to destroy the beginnings of spiritual life in our minds and hearts. These powers are very real. We have only to think of the temptations which come to us every day to be less than our best selves, to do little things which we know are wrong, to yield to persuasion instead of standing up for what we believe is right. Herod's killing of the little children of Bethlehem pictures the destruction which falsity and evil can accomplish. But Herod was not allowed to destroy the infant Lord. If we once receive the Lord into our lives, He is there to stay. He may have to be kept "in Egypt" for a time—in our memory-knowledge—but He will come back "when Herod is dead"—that is, when the temptations have been conquered.

Adult

The lesson is so familiar to every adult that the teacher need only cover briefly the background of the visit of the Wise Men and the correspondence of the

three gifts and then ask what points the class would like to discuss. The question of the reason for the Advent may be raised by the class. The teacher may be helped with this by referring to the first lesson from Matthew, which precedes this lesson in this volume.

We have seen that the Ancient Church possessed the Ancient Word and the knowledge of correspondences. When it ceased to be interested in serving the Lord and began to use its knowledge for worldly and selfish ends—the state pictured by the building of the Tower of Babel—the Lord took away from it the knowledge of the spiritual meaning of its forms and symbols so that it fell into various idolatries and its people were scattered over the face of the earth. One group—Abram and his family—were chosen as the basis for the formation of the Israelitish Church. The other groups continued their development separately in various places and were the beginning of the many pagan nations which we find in the world today. At the start they still possessed the Ancient Word and considerable knowledge of its meaning—Swedenborg says that in his day the Ancient Word was perhaps still in existence in Great Tartary*—and some among them venerated the book and cherished the knowledge they drew from it so that some study of correspondences persisted. With the evil, this took the form of magic and sorcery, but there were always good individuals who felt it to be their choicest possession.

The Wise Men who came to the Lord from the East were such good individuals. They knew and remembered ancient prophecies of the coming of the Messiah and the knowledge that He was to be born in the land of Canaan and to be “king of the Jews.” They also looked for a star as the sign of His coming. The prophecy of the star comes into our Word from the mouth of Balaam (Numbers 24:17), who came from the same eastern country as the Wise Men. Balaam showed in other ways that he possessed some knowledge of correspondences, as we learn from the directions he gave Balak

*[Tatary] : Historically an indefinite region in Asia and Europe, extending from the Sea of Japan to the Dnieper River. —*Merriam Geographical Dictionary*

for altars and sacrifices, but he was an evil man who tried to use his knowledge to advance himself. When the Wise Men in the East saw the star, they knew what it meant and were willing to take the long journey to the Holy Land to pay homage to the Messiah and to lay their gifts at His feet, the gifts themselves being chosen for their correspondence. The number of Wise Men is not given in the Word, nor are their names given, although tradition says that there were three (probably because of the three gifts) and even names them.

We recall that the sun, moon, and stars picture love to the Lord, faith in Him, and knowledges of heavenly things. When the Lord came into the world, it was to give men sure knowledge about Himself and about true heavenly life. So the star was the natural and beautiful symbol of His coming. It was not a material star; there is no record that anyone saw it except the Wise Men, and it obviously appeared and disappeared in no ordinary way. But the shepherds at Bethlehem saw a great light. Both the light and the star were spiritual appearances, and the spiritual eyes of the shepherds and Wise Men were opened to see them. The shepherds saw a light all about them because they were in good, innocent states and were of the people who possessed the Scriptures. But the Wise Men, who had no knowledge of the truth except from old tradition, saw the light of the new spiritual day as a far-off star. The shepherds picture those within the church who are good; the Wise Men picture those outside of the church who cherish what little truth they have and try to live according to it. The shepherds had only a short way to go to find the Lord, but the Wise Men had to make a long journey.

The Wise Men went first to Jerusalem. Their knowledge was not specific enough to show them the exact place of the Lord's birth; so they went to the king of the country. Jerusalem, where the temple was, pictures the church as to truth. This is where "the Gentiles" expect to find knowledge of the Lord, and the Wise Men did find there those learned in the letter of Scripture who could tell them that it was prophesied that the Messiah was to be born in

Bethlehem. So the church, even when it is not all that it should be, always has truth to give to those who really wish to find the Lord.

Bethlehem, earlier called Ephratah, was the birthplace of Benjamin—the site of Rachel's tomb—and was situated on the border between the territory of Judah and that of Benjamin, as the land was divided among the tribes. Like Benjamin, Bethlehem represents “the spiritual of the celestial.” This is the link between heaven and earth in us—the truth which is acquired as a result of goodness in the heart—just as Benjamin was the link between Joseph and his brothers, by which they could be reconciled to each other. So the Lord, in whose person God and man were united, was born in Bethlehem. Also Bethlehem was the city of David, who represented the Lord as to truth, His kingly quality. And the name *Bethlehem* means “house of bread,” and we remember that the Lord said, “I am the bread of life.” When the star appeared the second time to the Wise Men, it led them to the very place where the Lord was. Their knowledge at first was general, but after they had been instructed from the Scripture, it was specific.

In the Scriptures all offerings to the Lord picture the devotion of our lives to His service. The three gifts of the Wise Men represent this devotion on the three planes of will, thought, and deed. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” Gold is the offering of the heart, the attempt to drive out of our hearts all feelings which the Lord tells us are evil: pride, hatred, revenge, covetousness, jealousy. Frankincense is the offering of the mind: the determination to examine our ideas in the light of the teachings of the Lord’s Word and to reject as false whatever does not agree with the Word, no matter how firmly we have previously believed it; this involves trust in divine wisdom as being always and in every situation superior to our own. Myrrh is the offering of the outward life, the effort constantly to act toward others as the Lord would wish us to act.

After the Wise Men had presented their gifts, they returned to their own country by another way, not going back to Herod as he had asked them to do. We know that Herod’s motive in helping the

Wise Men to find the Lord was that he might kill Him. The Wise Men did not know this when they talked to Herod, but after they had seen the Lord, it could be revealed to them. The Lord's providence often permits selfish motives to bring us on our way toward finding the Lord—as children sometimes go to Sunday school for the sake of winning a pin or other token—but when we have found the Lord and devoted ourselves to His service, we are immediately given an understanding of the selfishness of our earlier motives, and we return to our work in another spirit.

The rest of our chapter shows us the immediate effect of the visit of the Wise Men on the worldly life which we have previously developed. Swedenborg tells us that as soon as a person begins to regenerate, temptation is permitted to come to him. The evils and falsities which have been governing his life, pictured by Herod, are stirred up to attempt to destroy the new beginning of spiritual life, to keep it from growing and coming to rule in their place. But divine providence protects the new beginning by preserving it in our memory—in Egypt—until we have gained the victory over the first temptations, that is, until Herod's death. After that, it is brought up in Galilee—on the plane of our outward conduct—first. It is the same process which we study in the Old Testament story. Every new beginning must spring from the heart and be confirmed by the mind, but then it must be worked out in the outward life before the evils and falsities in the heart and mind can finally be overcome.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 9293: "By 'gold, frankincense, and myrrh' are signified all things of the good of love and of faith in the Lord; by 'gold' those of the good of love; by 'frankincense' those of the good of faith; and by 'myrrh' those of both in things external. The reason why the Wise Men from the East offered these things, was that among some in the East there remained from ancient times the knowledge and wisdom of the men of old, which consisted in understanding and seeing heavenly and Divine things in those which are in the world and upon the earth. For it was known to the ancients that all things

correspond and are representative, and consequently have a signification; as is also evident from the most ancient books and monuments of the Gentiles. Consequently they knew that gold, frankincense, and myrrh signify the goods which are to be offered to God. They also knew from their prophetic writings, which were of the Ancient Church, that the Lord was to come into the world, and that a star would then appear to them."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Whose birthday is Christmas? *Jesus'*
J. How long ago did the Lord come into the world? *[relate to current year]*
P. Where was He born? *Bethlehem*
P. Who else was born in Bethlehem? *Benjamin, David*
J. What does the name *Bethlehem* mean? *house of bread*
J. Where did the Wise Men come from? *the East*
P. Why did they come? *saw His star*
J. How did they know what the star meant? *ancient knowledge of correspondence*
P. Where did they go first? *Jerusalem*
J. How did Herod find out where to send them? *scribes found prophecy*
P. How did they find the right house? *star*
P. What gifts did they bring the Lord? *gold, frankincense, myrrh*
J. Why did they not go back to Herod? *warned in a dream*
P. Where was Joseph told to take the Lord? *to Egypt*
P. How was he told? *in a dream*
J. What terrible crime did Herod commit? *killed all boy babies in and around Bethlehem*
J. When was Joseph told to bring the Lord back to the Holy Land? *after Herod's death*
J. Where did they go to live? *Nazareth, in Galilee*
I. What great gift did the Lord give us on the first Christmas Day? *Himself*
S. What are the three gifts we should bring Him? *love faith, obedience*

THE LORD'S BAPTISM

Matthew 3

In order to get a full picture of John the Baptist and his work as a background for teaching this lesson, the teacher should read also Matthew 11:7-15; 14:1-12; Mark 1:1-11; Luke 1:5-20, 39-45, 57-80; 3:10-14; John 1:19-30. The prophecies in Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 4:5-6 should be marked so that they can be found quickly and read to the classes.

Doctrinal Points

Baptism represents repentance and reformation, which must come before regeneration.

Notes for Parents

Many times in the Old Testament it was prophesied that when men had departed so far from the Lord that He could no longer reach them in any other way, He Himself would come into the world as the Messiah, the anointed one, to be their savior. As the time of the Advent drew nearer, they were also told by the prophets that a messenger would be sent before the Lord to prepare His way.

When a person has become deeply confirmed in bad habits, he cannot be made over all at once. People have been known to commit suicide because they were suddenly brought face to face with themselves as they really were and realized the full weight of their sins all at once. We need to recognize our evils little by little and fight them one by one, and gradually form good habits instead of bad and at last come to love the good.

John the Baptist was the messenger sent before the Lord to prepare His way, and John's message was, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The kingdom of heaven is always at hand for every one of us who wants it, if we will do this first work of reparation. John's baptism was a symbolic picture of the

cleansing of our outward lives by learning and obeying the precepts of the Word. And the further baptism which he said the Lord would give, the baptism with the Holy Spirit and with fire, pictures the entrance of the pure spirit of the Lord into our minds and of His unselfish love into our hearts after we have opened the way for Him by putting our outward lives in order. If we do our part, the Lord will always do His.

Why was the Lord baptized? He had committed no evils of which He needed to repent. John's words in verse 14 of our chapter express this thought. The Lord's answer to John in verse 15 is addressed to us also. The Lord is our example. He wished to be baptized because we should be baptized, and even if we understood no more about baptism than this, His words and example should settle any doubt in our minds as to the importance of baptism for us and our children.

But we do know more about baptism. In itself it is a holy symbol expressing the desire and intention to live a Christian life. When a grown person is baptized, he makes this profession for himself. When an infant or child is baptized, the parents promise to do all they can to bring up the child in the Christian life. Outwardly baptism introduces the person baptized into the body of Christians in the world. But it does more than this. Because it is a sacrament performed with words taken from the Bible, it also connects the person with Christian angels in the spiritual world, and makes it possible for the Lord to reach him in a new way. No one who feels his need of help in living as the Lord would have him live should neglect this divinely appointed means.

Primary

These children can be told a good deal about John the Baptist. Remind them of Elijah and tell them that John the Baptist was like him and that the Lord spoke of John as Elias, which is the Greek form of Elijah. Then tell them about the Lord's baptism and that every Christian should follow His example. The correspondence of baptism can be given in a simple way.

Do you remember where the Lord was born? And you remember that the wicked king Herod wanted to kill Him, and that Joseph and Mary took Him down into Egypt to save Him. They stayed in Egypt until king Herod died. Then the Lord told Joseph in a dream that they might go home. They did not go back to Bethlehem, for that was not their real home. They went to Nazareth, farther north in the Holy Land, and there the Lord grew up.

The Bible tells us that He was obedient to His parents and that He "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." He did not make Himself known as the promised Messiah until He was nearly thirty years old. The word *Messiah* means the same as *Christ*, the "anointed one." Do you remember how Samuel anointed Saul and David by pouring olive oil on their heads, to show that the Lord had chosen them? All through the Old Testament it had been prophesied that someday a Messiah would appear who would be God Himself come into the world. Jesus was this promised Messiah.

Who was sent to tell the people of His coming?

Why was he called John the Baptist?

Where did he live?

How was he dressed?

What was his food?

What did he tell the people to do?

How did he say the Lord would baptize them when He came?

When Jesus came to the Jordan, what did He have John do for Him?

You see, John recognized the Lord and knew how great He was, and at first hesitated to baptize Him because of this. But the Lord had come to show us all how we ought to live, and we all ought to be baptized. So the Lord was baptized. And when the people who were there heard what the voice from heaven said, they knew that the promised Messiah had come at last.

What did the voice from heaven say?

Junior

Have the Juniors look up the prophecies and show them why John the Baptist

was called "Elias which was for to come." The meaning of repentance should be stressed and the reason why we must repent before we can receive the Lord's spirit in our hearts. The three kinds of baptism can be explained.

Where was the Lord born?

By what three names is He called in the first chapter of Matthew?

What do they mean?

Where did Joseph take the Lord to save Him from Herod?

Where did they go to live when they came back?

Look up Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1. The story of how these prophecies were fulfilled is told in our chapter for today.

What was the name of this messenger of the Lord?

What was his message?

Where did John the Baptist live?

How did he dress?

What was his food?

What did he do for those who came to him?

In what river did he baptize?

In a Bible dictionary we read the following: "JORDAN (the descender), the one river of Palestine, has a course of little more than 200 miles, from the roots of Anti-Lebanon to the head of the Dead Sea . . . There were fords over against Jericho . . . Higher up were the fords or passages of Bethbarah . . . Thus there were two customary places at which the Jordan was fordable; and it must have been at one of these, if not at both, that baptism was afterward administered by St. John and by the disciples of our Lord. Where our Lord was baptized is not stated expressly, but it was probably at the upper ford."

How did John tell the people the Lord would baptize them?

The Holy Spirit is a name for the Lord's own spirit. Water is the symbol of truth, and fire is the symbol of love. The baptism with water is a sign that we want to make our lives clean according to the Lord's truth. This is hard sometimes because it means trying to find out what wrong things we are doing, admitting them, and not doing them anymore. This is repentance. But after we have made our lives clean in this way, the Lord can come into our minds

and hearts and fill them with His own loving spirit. Then we can be happy in doing right. There is really no other way to be happy, for doing wrong always leads to unhappiness. This is why John the Baptist, with his message of repentance and his baptism with water, had to come before the Lord "to prepare his ways."

The Pharisees and Sadducees did not want to repent or to do right, but only to be saved from the punishment of their sins. John told them that they could not be saved without repenting and doing right. Sometimes when we have done wrong, we say we are sorry, hoping to escape punishment, when we are not really sorry that we have done wrong but only that we have been found out and may suffer for it; we would do the same thing again if we thought we could hide it. This is not repentance and it will not do us any good. Read verse 12. What do you think are meant by the wheat and the chaff?

The Lord insisted on being baptized by John because He came to show us the right way to live, and it is right that we should be baptized.

Why did John at first not want to baptize the Lord?

After the Lord was baptized what was seen?

What did the voice from heaven say?

The dove which descended upon the Lord was a sign of His perfect innocence. He never actually did anything wrong, but He was tempted to do wrong and had to fight temptation with the truth, just as we do. Our next lesson will tell about His temptation.

Jesus as to His soul was God Himself, but while He lived in the world He was often called the Son of God because He had clothed Himself in a mind and body like ours which was not of itself divine.



Intermediate

More can be done in this class with the meaning of baptism and of repentance and with the meaning of the Lord's being baptized. Show the young people why the voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son," and connect this teaching with the lessons from Matthew 1 and 2.

The Gospel of Matthew tells nothing of the Lord's childhood after He returned from Egypt except that He was brought up in Nazareth. Our chapter for today tells us how His active ministry began with His coming to John to be baptized. He was about thirty years old at this time.

Read Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1. When the Lord was born, only a few people were in such a state that they could be told of His birth. The great mass of the people—even those who wanted to be good—had lost all knowledge of the truth and were living evil lives, although often through ignorance. In that state they could not have accepted the Lord. They had to be made to realize their evil state and at least make a start at reformation before they could receive the Lord and His teaching, just as the whole Hebrew nation centuries before had had to wander in the wilderness until all the rebellious had died off before they could enter the Holy Land. So John the Baptist was sent before the Lord to preach repentance and to baptize all who wished to cleanse their lives. We cannot learn to do what is right until we see and acknowledge the things that are wrong in our lives and stop doing them. This is repentance. It is often hard work, for we are all selfish, and our minds are clever at finding excuses. John, like the old prophets, was a wild, rough man, clothed in a hairy garment and wearing a leather belt. These are symbols of the hard appearance of the truth when we first try to live it. John's baptism with water—and ours—is the sign of the desire to make one's life clean according to the Lord's truth.

But after we have done this work of repentance, the Lord can come into our lives and fill them with His loving spirit, making it easy and delightful to do right. The baptism with water is the cleansing of the outward life. This is our part. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the cleansing of our thoughts as the Lord's truth becomes established in our minds. The baptism with fire is the entrance of the Lord's unselfish love into our hearts.

Sometimes we think we are sorry for wrong things we have done when really we are sorry only that we have been found out.

This is not repentance. The Pharisees and Sadducees came to John because they wanted to seem good and to escape the punishment for their sins. But John told them they could not be saved unless they brought forth "fruits meet for repentance," that is, unless they stopped doing evil. "Cease to do evil; learn to do well" is the rule for everyone who wants to attain the kingdom of heaven.

The Lord insisted on being baptized for two reasons: first, because He came to be our example; and second, because He had to fight temptations by means of the truth, even though He had no actual wrongdoing of which to repent, as the descent of the dove upon Him pictures. The dove, among birds, like the lamb among animals, is the symbol of innocence.

We need not be confused by the fact that in the Gospels the Lord is often called the Son of God. When the Lord chose to be born into the world, He took on through Mary a human nature like ours in which He could meet all the evils which we inherit; only in this way could He overcome them and show us how to do the same with His help. The finite human nature was not God and it was what the people saw rather than the divine soul within. So the record of His earthly life calls Him the Son of God and also the Son of man. Read Isaiah 9:6. This prophecy shows how the Lord, coming into the world as a child, was to rise gradually in the estimation of His disciples from babyhood on, until He could be recognized by them as "the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

Basic Correspondences

baptism with water = cleansing our outward lives according to truth from the Word

baptism with the Holy Spirit = the cleansing of our thoughts by the Lord's truth

baptism with fire = unselfish love from the Lord cleansing our hearts

the dove = innocence in the mind

Senior

The doctrine of baptism should be elaborated, using the material on its three uses at the end of the lesson, and the meaning of the three kinds of baptism should be given. Call the attention of the young people to the fact that John's ministry bears the same relation to the Lord's which the wilderness journey bears to the conquest of the Holy Land.

The Gospel of Matthew gives none of the incidents of the Lord's infancy and boyhood found in Luke. Chapter 2 closes with the return from Egypt and the settlement in Nazareth, and chapter 3 begins with the ministry of John the Baptist nearly thirty years later. And John appears, as he does in the Gospels of Mark and John, without the preparation which the Gospel of Luke provides in the story of Zacharias and Elisabeth. But the meeting of John and Jesus at Jordan is described in all four Gospels, and the Lord's baptism in the first three.

The Lord's own reason for being baptized is stated in verse 15: "for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." This is our first and really our most compelling argument for the Christian Sacrament of Baptism. But we are given to know what baptism signifies, why it was instituted, and the use it performs for us. John's message gives us the meaning of baptism: "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The kingdom of heaven is always at hand. The Lord is always at the door of our lives waiting to be admitted. Repentance is nothing else than the cleansing of the life by means of truth from the Word in order that the Lord's spirit may find entrance into our minds and His love into our hearts. And we are told that baptism, through its correspondence, actually does establish a direct connection between the person baptized and the Christian heavens, as well as a recognized membership in the body of Christians on earth.

Nevertheless our chapter also points out that baptism, to be effective, must be followed by the effort to live a good life. The promises made at the time of baptism by the person himself or by his parents or godparents are not idle forms. They must be kept. The way opened by baptism between the soul and heaven must be

kept open and the heavenly life must be cultivated and bear fruit, for "every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire."

John's baptism with water pictures the reformation of the external life, bringing it into the order of the commandments. This is our part of the covenant. But it is the least part, just as it is elsewhere said of John that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. We do not save ourselves. We merely enable the Lord to save us. But if we do this small part, the baptism with water will be followed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit and with fire, the Lord's baptism of truth and love. We can all see this from our own experience. If we recognize a bad habit, strive to overcome it with the Lord's help, and form a good habit in its place, we shall soon realize how much better the good habit is than the bad one and come to love it, wondering how we could ever have done otherwise.

The Lord's ministry began with baptism because He chose to take on a humanity just like ours, in which He had to fight evils just as we do: to learn the truth from the Scriptures, recognize what was contrary to it and shun this as evil. That He had no actual evil of which to repent, had never committed evil during His childhood and youth, was pictured by the descent of the dove upon Him, the dove symbolizing innocence.

The voice from heaven was the confirmation at the beginning of the Lord's ministry that the soul within was God. The mind and body taken on from Mary were not the infinite God, but the real person within was. We know, if we think about it, that each of us has a real self which is within and above his body and even the part of his mind that is concerned with his body. In us this real self to begin with is selfish, because of our inheritance from the ancestry of both our parents. Our first impulse is always to serve self. The Lord did not have this deep interior selfishness because He had no earthly father. The Lord's "self" was divine unselfish love for all mankind. So, although in the outer self which He took on from Mary He could be attacked by all the hells, and although He fought the hells in this outer plane just as we have to, He always

conquered. At first all men saw of Him was the outer man, just as when we meet a new acquaintance, all we see at first is his outward appearance and the things he wishes us to see of his thoughts and feelings. But as we come to know this friend, gradually the real person comes out into view whether he wishes it or not. So the Lord was not at once called the Father or God, but the Son of God and also the Son of man. It was not until near the end of His earthly life that he could openly say He was the Father (John 14:9). Read Isaiah 9:6 to see how this was prophesied.

Adult

The best discussion topics are the connection of the Old and New Testaments through John the Baptist, the meaning of his message, the three kinds of baptism, and the reason why the Lord wished to be baptized.

In connection with this lesson it is helpful to read Matthew 11:7-15 and 17:10-13 and John 1:19-30, and in the *Arcana* number 9372 (see the excerpt below). We see that John testifies of himself that he is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 40:3, and that the Lord testifies that John is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Malachi 4:5-6. In the letter, then, John is a very important link between the Old and the New Testaments. The prophecy in Malachi tells us that the Lord sent John to prepare the people so that the coming of the Lord should not smite the earth with a curse. How could the Lord's coming be a curse to anyone? Suppose a person has lived an evil life and has forgotten all he ever knew of what is true and right; then suddenly he sees—really sees—what true human life should be, and sees himself in all his blackness with no knowledge of how any change in himself could be accomplished. Would not this realization seem to curse him and perhaps even drive him to self-destruction? Indeed men have been known to commit suicide because they suddenly awoke to the realization of some great evil for which they had been responsible. The people of Bible days had fallen into a state in which they were wholly corrupt, with no knowledge of right remaining

in their minds. If those who might still be affected by good had not been prepared beforehand, the Lord's coming would have struck them like a bolt of lightning. They had first to be turned from their evil ways so that heavenly influences could surround them by means of which they could approach the Lord. In the same way, we have to be led to see the evils in ourselves one by one and to correct them; our interior evils are hidden from us until we have gained spiritual strength by correcting the exterior ones.

The work of pointing out our external evils and calling us to repent and turn from them is done by the letter of the Word. This is our "John the Baptist." In the Scripture story all the prophets represent the Word, but particularly Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and John the Baptist. This is why John is called "Elias which was for to come." It is why he dressed the same way as Elijah (II Kings 1:8), the camel's hair garment representing the letter of the Word and the leathern girdle or belt the external things which tie it together and connect it with the spiritual sense, the places, for example, where the spiritual sense appears in the letter. It is also why he ate locusts and wild honey, which represent the most external truths and their delight. John lived in the wilderness of Judea because that was a picture of the state into which the church had fallen. John's message, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," is the message of the letter of the Word, with its commands and prohibitions and its promise of blessedness if only we will obey. Read Luke 3:10-14 and see how John singled out the particular sins of the different classes of people who came to him and bade them turn from them. This is what the Word should do for us. It is not repentance to confess that we are sinners and not single out and correct any particular sin. Repentance is not saying we are sorry; it is refusing to repeat the sin and learning to hate it. If we refuse to do this first work, which is our part of the covenant, the Lord cannot fulfill His part and bless us with His spirit, for His spirit cannot enter where sin is. How often we close our eyes to our own evils or spend our time trying to find excuses for them when the one thing necessary is to acknowledge and get rid of

them! How prone we are to blame other people for our unhappiness, when unhappiness always comes from within ourselves! "A man's foes shall be they of his own household."

Baptism with water is the correspondential sign of this repentance. It pictures the cleansing of our outward lives according to the Lord's truth. The Jordan was the symbol of the truths which give entrance into the Holy Land of spiritual living, the simple truths of the letter of the Word, summed up in the ten commandments. So John baptized in Jordan, just as Naaman was cleansed of his leprosy when, in obedience to Elisha, he washed seven times in Jordan. All the washings of the Old Testament had this meaning, and in the Christian Church baptism takes the place of circumcision and all the ancient Hebrew ceremonial washings, as the Holy Supper takes the place of all the ancient Hebrew sacrifices and feasts. The baptism of an infant is a sign that the child's parents intend to bring him up according to the Lord's truth, and it is a symbol of entrance into the Christian Church. And because the Sacrament of Baptism is carried out in accordance with the letter of the Word, it connects the child with heaven through correspondences and places the child, as to his spirit, in the Christian heavens. So baptism affects both the parents and the child. This is why the people present at a baptism feel the heavenly sphere.

But John speaks of another baptism, with which the Lord will baptize, the baptism "with the Holy Spirit and with fire." We have said that except as we repent of our actual evils, the Lord's spirit cannot come in and bless us. The baptism with water must come first. But as we repent and correct our outward lives, the Lord's spirit does come in to take the place of the selfish spirit which prevailed before. This is the baptism with the Holy Spirit. And finally we come to love to do right because unselfish love has entered our hearts from the Lord. This is the baptism with fire. Repentance is our part. The Lord never fails to perform His part. "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" is a prayer which we should all know and use.

The Lord taught us, by His own example, that baptism is a

necessary step in a truly good life. John recognized the Lord as the Messiah, the one whose shoes he knew himself unworthy to bear, and hesitated when the Lord came to him to be baptized. But Jesus told him, "Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." With us baptism symbolizes repentance. The Lord needed no repentance; He had committed no sin. But in His assumed humanity were all the tendencies to evil which men had ever had, and He had felt and fought these by means of the truths of the letter of the Word, just as men do. He was cleansing His assumed humanity by means of the truth and bringing it into divine form. So it was fitting for Him to fulfill also the external symbol of the internal work He was doing, and He was baptized by John in Jordan. His baptism was a sign that He was accomplishing in the outer plane of His life the glorification which is the prototype of our regeneration. The dove and the voice from heaven were the signs—correspondential signs—of the inner results of this work, that divine wisdom and love flowed into His humanity as fast as He drove out evil by victories over temptations. The "beloved Son" was the humanity which was being made over into divine form.

Even if we had no understanding of the meaning and uses of baptism, the fact that the Lord insisted upon being baptized should convince us that it is necessary.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 9372: "In the Word there are many who represent the Lord in respect to truth Divine, or in respect to the Word; but chief among them are Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and John the Baptist . . . by the wilderness of Judaea in which John was is signified the state in which the Word was at the time when the Lord came into the world . . . the Word in the ultimate, or such as it is in the external form in which it appears before man in the world, is described by the 'clothing' and 'food' of John the Baptist . . . by 'camel's hair' are signified memory-truths such as appear there before a man in the world; by the 'leathern girdle' is signified the external bond connecting and keeping in order all the interior things . . . by 'locusts' are signified ultimate or most general truths; and by 'wild honey,' their pleasantness."

True Christian Religion, n. 677-684: "The *first use* of baptism is introduction into the Christian Church, and at the same time insertion among Christians in the spiritual world . . . That it is merely a sign of introduction into the church, is made clear by the baptizing of infants, who are wholly destitute of reason and are no more able to receive anything pertaining to faith than the young branches of a tree . . . But in the heavens infants are introduced by baptism into the Christian heaven, and angels are there assigned them by the Lord, to take care of them . . . The *second use* of baptism is, that the Christian may know and acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ, the Redeemer and Savior, and follow Him . . . 'The name of the Lord Jesus Christ' means in the Word nothing else than acknowledgment of Him, and a life according to His commandments . . . The *third use* of baptism, which is the final use, is that man may be regenerated. This is the essential use for the sake of which baptism exists, and thus the final one."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Where was the Lord born? *Bethlehem*
- P. Where was He taken to save Him from Herod? *Egypt*
- P. Where was He brought up? *Nazareth*
- J. How old was He when He began His ministry? *about thirty*
- P. Who was sent to prepare the way of the Lord? *John the Baptist*
- P. How was John the Baptist dressed? *camel hair garment, leather belt*
- P. What was his food? *locusts, wild honey*
- J. What was his message? *Repent!*
- J. Where did he baptize? *Jordan*
- J. What three kinds of baptism did he speak of? *water, Holy Spirit, fire*
- P. Who came to John to be baptized? *Jesus*
- J. How did John feel about it? *unworthy*
- J. What did the Lord tell him? "*It is fitting . . . to fulfill all righteousness*"
- P. When the Lord was baptized, what was seen coming from heaven? *dove*
- P. What did the voice from heaven say? "*This is my beloved Son*"
- I. What do the three kinds of baptism picture? *repentance, reformation, regeneration*
- S. What are the three uses of baptism? *(1) to fulfill righteousness, (2) to point way to repentance, (3) to establish Christian spiritual environment*
OR (1) that a person be called a Christian, (2) that he may know and follow the Lord, (3) that he may be regenerated

THE LORD'S TEMPTATIONS

Matthew 4:1-11

This lesson should be made very practical for all the children, for they can progress spiritually only as they learn to recognize and fight against their individual temptations as of themselves. All children much of the time feel the desire to do right, but unless the desire is intelligently directed it may be wasted. The efforts of their parents must so often be exercised through correction and restraint when the children are actually in selfish and willful states that parents find it hard to put off the tone of command at other times. But in Sunday school the teacher has the opportunity to treat the children's temptations objectively while they are in good and teachable states. Show them first that temptation comes from the hells and that it is a battle between evil spirits and angels for control of their minds and hearts. And then point out that the deciding factor in this battle is their own free choice.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord was tempted throughout His earthly life on deeper and deeper levels.

We live in the spiritual world as to our thoughts and feelings even while we are on earth, and we are constantly associated with both good and bad spirits.

Notes for Parents

You remember that the Lord's stay in Egypt when He was an infant pictured the fact that in His assumed humanity He began in ignorance just as we do and had to acquire knowledge in His memory by learning it, and that the knowledge He particularly chose to acquire was the letter of the Old Testament Scriptures. Our lesson for today shows how He made use of some of this knowledge.

We all know from experience that when we make a good resolution, we are almost immediately tempted to break it. This is why in the Scripture story the Lord's baptism is immediately followed by His forty days of temptation in the wilderness. Although no doubt the Lord did spend these forty days in the wilderness wrestling with temptation in preparation for His public ministry, the account as it is given us in the Bible is symbolic. The three temptations represent *all* the Lord's temptations—which He had been undergoing from infancy and continued to undergo to the last one on the cross—and all our temptations. For temptation is of three types in its essential character: (1) the temptation to be satisfied with an external appearance of goodness instead of looking constantly to the Lord for guidance; (2) the temptation to think that if we go to church and profess to believe in the Lord, He will somehow get us into heaven no matter what kind of life we live; and (3) the temptation to turn from the Lord altogether and spend our lives trying to get all we can for ourselves. You will find these three types pictured by the three temptations in the story if you think about them.

The devil in the story is also a symbolic figure, picturing the influence of the hells, which are always trying to stir up our inherited selfishness in order to do us harm. There is no one great devil, but all the evil spirits in hell are called devils. It may help us if in temptation we realize that the evil promptings which arise in our hearts and minds are not our own but are from hell, and that we can reject them, if we will, with the Lord's help.

And in our story the Lord teaches us plainly how to get that help. In each case He answered the tempter with the words, "It is written," and quoted Scripture. The Lord's power is in the letter of the Word. The letter of the Word is our connecting link with the Lord and the angels, and they reach us through the passages from the Word which we have in our memories. This is why it is so important for us to read the Word regularly and for our children to hear it read and to memorize verses from it.

Most of us have some particular fault which we say is our "beset-

ting sin." If we really want to overcome it, there is no better way than to find some verse in the Word which either expressly forbids it or commands its opposite, memorize the verse, and repeat it every time the temptation strikes. We have suggested that even the youngest children learn the Lord's words from our chapter, "Get thee hence, Satan," and say them whenever they are tempted to do anything you have forbidden them to do. And none of us is too old or too good to need and use these words often.

Primary

Even very young children can understand the nature and source of temptation. Read them the story from the Word and tell them that the Lord was showing us how to be good. Then talk about some of their own little temptations and how to overcome them. Introduce the idea that when bad thoughts and impulses come into their minds, they are from evil spirits, and that they can refuse to entertain them just as the Lord did. Moreover, the Lord and the angels will help them if they try to be good.

After the Lord was baptized, He went out alone and lived in the wilderness of Judea for forty days, strengthening Himself against temptation. Temptation is wanting to do something you know is wrong. What are some of your own temptations? Perhaps there is something your mother has told you never to touch. When you are alone in the room with it, a little voice inside your mind suddenly says, "Why not touch it now? No one will know." This little voice is not really your own voice; it is a bad spirit from hell, a devil, trying to persuade you to do wrong. But at the same time your guardian angel is whispering to you, too, saying, "Don't do it; you know it is wrong." And you are the one who has to decide whether to do what the devil tells you to do or what the angel says. And you know from experience that if you choose to obey the devil, you will be very likely to get into trouble.

When the Lord Jesus was living on earth, He often heard devils whispering to Him, just as you do, but He always was strong enough to say no to them. And in our lesson He shows us the very best way to answer a devil when he is tempting us to do wrong.

How did the devil tempt Him first?
What did the Lord answer?
Then where did the devil take Him?
What did he tell Him to do?
How did he try to persuade Him?
How did the Lord answer?
Where did they go next?
What was the third temptation?

You notice that every time the devil tempted Him, the Lord answered, "It is written," and then quoted something from the Bible. When we quote the Bible, we are calling on the Lord for help, and He is always there to help us.

Do you think the devil ever tempts us?
What does our lesson teach us is the best way to answer temptation?
When the devil finally left the Lord, who came to Him?
When we do right, the angels are always close to us.

Can you learn four words from our lesson? They are, "Get thee hence, Satan." Now the next time you are tempted to do something you have been told not to do, just think to yourself, "This is a devil whispering to me and I don't want to have anything to do with him," and then say, "Get thee hence, Satan," and turn your back on the thing you are tempted to do and start right in doing something you know is all right for you to do. Then the angels can make you happy, just as they came and ministered to the Lord after His temptation was over.

Junior

We have seen what repentance is and the necessity for it. This lesson should give the children a technique for overcoming their faults. It may even be reduced to a set of rules: (1) Recognize the particular fault. (2) Find and commit to memory a passage of Scripture which forbids this fault or strongly recommends the opposite conduct. (3) When you catch yourself indulging in your fault, say to yourself, "The evil spirits are trying to stir me up to do wrong." (4) Repeat your passage of Scripture to yourself—or even aloud, if that helps—and keep repeating it more and more thoughtfully until the temptation is passed. (5) Thank the Lord for helping you, and remember that the

angels are now near you. (6) Turn immediately to some good and useful activity which will occupy your attention and keep you from slipping back into your former state. As usual, have the children look up all the references suggested in their notes.

Who was John the Baptist?
What was his message?
Why was the Lord baptized by John?
What sign was given from heaven?
What did the voice from heaven say?

When the Lord was on earth, He was tempted to do wrong just as we are. Our lesson today is about His temptations. It is the only story in the Bible which tells directly that He was tempted, but we must understand that it is a parable describing the different kinds of temptations which He was meeting and overcoming all through His life from His infancy to His death on the cross.

The devil is not one "super-evil" person. In the other life all who have chosen to love evil rather than good and therefore are in the hells are called devils. "The devil" means the whole power of evil. "Satan" in the Bible means the whole power of falsity.

After His baptism the Lord went into the wilderness and fasted for forty days and forty nights. Did you ever make up your mind that you would be good—better than you had ever been before—and find it pretty hard, dry work? This is like the Lord's fasting in the wilderness. And then, just as you are feeling as if you would die if you couldn't do some of the old naughty things, someone comes along and tries to get you to do one. If you have ever had this experience, you can understand why in the Bible this story of the Lord's temptations comes just where it does.

What are the three temptations in the story?
Now look at the Lord's answers to the tempter in verses 4, 7, and 10.
What series of three words occurs in each of them?
Where are all these answers "written"?
Look up Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:16, and 6:13.

The Lord answered the devil with quotations from the Scriptures. This is just what we ought to do when we are tempted, first because thinking what the Bible says helps us to realize how wrong

the thing is, and second because the Lord is in His Word and His power can come into our hearts through it and help us to have courage to do right. If you have a particular fault which you are trying to overcome, the best thing to do is to learn a verse from the Word which either speaks against that fault or commands its opposite, and say this verse to yourself every time you are tempted. Say it over and over again, if necessary, until you no longer feel like doing wrong. The effort to remember it and say it will help to take your mind off of the wrong thing on which it was bent. And when the temptation has been overcome, you will be happy in doing right. Read verse 11. When we have won a victory over temptation, we feel a special kind of satisfaction and happiness. Then we may know that the angels are close to us and that it is their happiness which we are feeling. Whenever you are tempted, try to remember that if you decide to do something wrong, you are choosing the company of devils, but if you decide to do what is right, you are choosing the company of the angels.

Intermediate

Take up first the meaning of the three temptations. Then follow the same pattern as for the Juniors and continue by calling attention to verse 6, and note the fact that the Scripture is given us to use in correcting our faults, not in excusing them. When we misuse it, it is like the devil quoting it.

Baptism, we have said, is the sign of the desire to make one's life clean according to the Lord's truth. When we try to put this determination into practice, we are likely to go through a period of difficulty when virtue seems a dry business and selfish indulgence looks more pleasant than ever before. This is why in the story of the Lord's life His baptism is followed by the account of His fasting in the wilderness and His temptations.

The story of the Lord's temptations by the devil is a parable. There is no one great devil, although all in the hells who are ruled by the love of evil are called devils. "The devil" is the personification of all the power of evil, and "Satan" is the personification of all the power of falsity. Likewise, the three temptations recorded

in the story are symbolic of all the temptations through which the Lord was constantly passing throughout His life on earth.

The first—to turn stones into bread—is the temptation to make truth on the natural plane satisfy our minds, the idea that we can be good by doing external good works without caring about knowledge of God and spiritual things.

The second—to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, trusting in God's promise to take care of Him—is the temptation to do things which we know are wrong and dangerous to our souls and expect the Lord to save us in spite of our folly, to imagine, for example, that if we go to church and say we believe in the Lord, we can do about as we please the rest of the week.

The third—to fall down and worship the devil—is the temptation to give up the effort to learn and do the Lord's will and to seek only self-interest and self-satisfaction.

These three temptations sum up and cover all our temptations on the three planes of conduct, thought, and will. The Lord doubtless did spend forty days in the wilderness after His baptism wrestling with the inherent tendencies to evil in His finite human nature in preparation for His public ministry, but this was not His only period of temptation. He did not go through all His temptations in one great battle, as we might imagine from the literal story. He had been meeting them, as we do, day by day from infancy onward, and He would continue to meet them in ever deeper forms until the final great temptation on the cross. They are merely summed up for us in this chapter. The wilderness, we remember, pictures a barren state, and the number forty is one of the symbols of temptation.

Now notice how the Lord met the tempter. Recall that His stay in Egypt when He was an infant pictured the fact that in His childhood He had to learn just as we do, and what He especially chose to learn was the letter of the Old Testament Scriptures. So now in each temptation He was able to answer, "It is written" and quote the passage of Scripture which most clearly forbade the evil suggested. This is our example. The Lord is in His Word. When we learn

passages of Scripture and repeat them in times of temptation, the Lord's power can flow through them into our hearts and give us strength to do right. If we wish to fight a particular fault, there is no better way than to find a verse in the Word which condemns this fault or commands its opposite good, learn the verse, and repeat it whenever we are tempted. And if a temptation comes for which we have no special verse, the Lord's words in verse 10, "Get thee hence, Satan," will always help us. For when we are tempted, we may know that "the devil and satan" are at our elbow stirring up our natural selfishness. And if we resist bravely and overcome the temptation, we are rejecting the devil and choosing instead the company of the angels who are always at hand desiring to help us.

Read verse 11. From the teachings of the New Church, we know that we are living in two worlds all the time. Our physical bodies and our natural senses focus our consciousness on the material world about us, but our desires and thoughts are not material. Our souls are in the spiritual world now—Swedenborg tells us that we are even sometimes seen by the angels as shadows in their midst—and we are choosing from moment to moment to live in heaven or in hell.

Basic Correspondences

stone = truth, especially truth on
the outward or natural plane

bread = the good of love

Senior

The whole lesson is particularly interesting at the Senior level, as they are beginning to recognize some of the deeper temptations. Stress the need of daily study and use of the Word.

The account of the Lord's baptism is immediately followed by the story of His temptations in the wilderness. Thinking of baptism as the dedication of oneself to a life according to divine truth, one sees that it is inevitable that temptations will immediately be felt.

The Lord was tempted throughout His life on earth. Indeed He took on a finite humanity for the very purpose of meeting the temptations inherent in it. We are not often reminded in the Gospels of His struggles with His assumed nature, but they are summed up in the story of these three temptations in the wilderness. In the *Arcana* we have, in the celestial sense of Genesis and Exodus and the related passages, a study of the Lord's continuous struggle, and we realize that the hardest part of it for Him came from His desire to save everyone. In reference to the Lord's life—that is, in its inmost sense—the wilderness pictures the state of the church as the Lord saw it in His day, and His temptations were temptations to find some means of saving the people even against their will. But in our own lives the wilderness pictures rather the state of uncertainty and discouragement which frequently comes over anyone who turns from a life of self-seeking to attempt the spiritual life. Forty, we remember, symbolizes temptation. No doubt it is a fact that Jesus went into the wilderness after His baptism and fasted there for forty days and forty nights and wrestled with temptation, but the record of this in the Word is a parable for our instruction.

The assumed humanity of the Lord, being from the human race, was also a "wilderness," full of temptations. It even yearned at first for the satisfactions of the flesh and so understood the same yearning in the people. So we may think of the first of the three temptations as picturing in its lowest sense these physical yearnings, and in a little higher sense the willingness to be satisfied with external and natural ideas of goodness, the thought that if we do things to make our neighbor comfortable physically, no deep thought of the Lord and spiritual things is necessary for us. The second temptation is an intellectual one, the tendency to think it is enough if we know the truth from the Word and professedly accept it, without humbly obeying it. The pinnacle of the temple pictures intellectual arrogance, and the temptation is to use the Scriptures as an excuse for our evils—this is the devil quoting Scripture. The third and deepest temptation is the temptation to make others serve us, to impose our opinions and our will on those

around us so far as we have power to do so. We can see that with the Lord, whose power was infinite and who knew that His will was right, this temptation was directed against His inmost love of saving the whole human race. The same temptation is expressed in His prayer at Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39) and in His words on the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

The Lord answered each temptation by quoting the Word. He was carrying out the promise of His baptism, judging His finite humanity and forcing it to obey the truth, and so bringing it into the order of the Word that the divine nature within might act through it. We should note the difference between the Lord's use of Scripture to resist evil and the devil's use of Scripture to justify it. And we should remember this story as a warning to us to be careful not to imitate the devil instead of the Lord. It is easier than we may think to misuse Scripture passages in this way. For example, the familiar passage, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" is often used to excuse neglect of the Word and of the church and to teach that after all external good works are the essential of goodness.

It was only after the successful conclusion of these temptations that the divine soul became so manifest in the finite body of the Lord that He could say simply, "Follow me," and good men would turn from their natural employments and devote themselves to His service. And only then could He begin to teach and preach and perform miracles.

Adult

Point out first that the Lord met temptations constantly throughout His earthly life, and read to the class the quotation at the end of the lesson. Take up the meaning of the three temptations and discuss temptation in general, its source, why it is permitted to come to us, and how we should meet it.

What do we mean by temptation? Perhaps the simplest answer is "the desire to do something we know is wrong." Where does this desire come from? We feel it as coming from ourselves; yet the

desire to resist the temptation seems to be in us too. We speak of our higher and our lower self and wonder sometimes which is our real self. The fact is that in each one of us are countless things both good and bad of which most of the time we are unconscious. The impulses which stir them up and bring them to our consciousness are not from ourselves at all but from the heavens and the hells, and the Lord's providence keeps us perfectly balanced between the two so that we are free to choose which impulse we shall follow. The Lord protects us so that we shall never be tempted beyond our power to resist if we look to Him for help (see I Corinthians 10:13). We sometimes say, "The temptation was too strong for me; I could not help doing what I did," but this is not being really honest. As we look back over our lives, we know that there is nothing we have ever done which we could not have done differently. We are free to choose between good and bad companions, companions who help us to do right and those who lead us into doing wrong. And it is useful for us to realize that we have other companions than those whom we see in the world around us. We have to choose between good and bad spiritual companions. We feel their influence; sometimes we almost hear their voices. We are not responsible for the bad thoughts and feelings which come up in all of us unexpectedly, but we are responsible if we let them stay. Anger, hatred, jealousy, spite, covetousness, pride are stirred up in us by evil spirits who delight to lead us into harm, just as bad companions in the world do; indeed they are evil spirits just because when they were in the world, they chose to take delight in evil. But these bad impulses and thoughts are not ours unless we yield to them. We can say, "No," to the suggestion of an evil spirit just as we can to the suggestion of a bad earthly companion.

Why does the Lord permit us to be tempted? Because if we did not freely choose what is good, we could not make good our own to keep forever, and if we saw nothing but good, we should have no choice. Choice necessarily implies an alternative. If we did not see the evils in ourselves, we could not reject them. So, as we progress, the Lord permits evil spirits to stir up deeper and deeper

evils in our hereditary nature so that we may, if we will, choose higher and higher goods. This is the way in which our character is developed and strengthened, just as our muscles are developed by performing ever harder and harder tasks. We should not court temptation, for we do not know our own weakness; only the Lord can judge how far we are prepared to meet evil. Our own desire should be always to live among good spiritual companions. So we are rightly taught to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." But when, in the Lord's providence, temptation comes, we should meet it boldly and use all the means the Lord has provided to help us resist it. This is what our lesson today teaches.

The account of the Lord's temptations in the wilderness is symbolic of all the temptations which He underwent daily from the beginning of His life on earth to the end. Although His forty days' fast in the wilderness is historically true, all the details of the story are correspondential and some of them are obviously parable rather than actual fact. We have learned from the story of John that the wilderness of Judea pictures the state of the church at that time. The Lord's baptism, picturing the determination to cleanse the assumed human, immediately brought His divine nature into conflict with the church as summed up in His heredity from Mary. So the temptations in the wilderness follow directly upon the baptism. We know that with us, too, a good resolution always seems to be followed by an immediate temptation to break it. The number forty is a symbol of temptation. In our story the tempter is called "the devil" and is addressed as "satan." These are not individuals. All the power of evil in the hells is summed up under the term "devil," and all the power of falsity under the name "satan." In His humanity the Lord met the attacks of all the powers of the hells.

The three temptations picture temptation on the three planes of life. Stones represent truths on the natural plane, and to make them into bread to satisfy hunger is to find our satisfactions in natural external good works and taking credit to ourselves for them, without looking to the Lord for guidance and power. The Lord's answer to the tempter points to the fact that we are primarily

spiritual beings and are not living truly human lives if we take no interest in spiritual things. The second temptation is on the intellectual plane, the temptation to think that "faith alone" is sufficient for salvation, that if we know about the Lord and say we believe in Him, He will somehow save us no matter what we do. The pinnacle of the temple pictures satisfaction in knowledge about the Lord, the temple being the symbol of the doctrine of the church. And to cast oneself down from this pinnacle is to go from a high to a low state of life by not trying to live according to the truth one knows. When we feel that we are better than other people because we belong to the church and go to church on Sunday—and that because we do, the Lord will admit us to heaven no matter how selfish we really are—we are feeling this temptation. And the Lord tells us, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." If we look up this quotation in Deuteronomy 6:16, we find that instead of tempting God we are diligently to "keep the commandments of the Lord," and to "do that which is right and good in the sight of the Lord" if we wish to attain the promised land. In this life we never reach a point where we are "good enough." If we think we are, we are standing on the pinnacle of the temple and are in imminent danger of falling off. And we must not rely on the Lord's mercy to save us, when He has told us plainly never to cease the battle against evils in our hearts. The third temptation of the Lord is the inmost, the temptation to let selfishness take possession of our hearts. To put self first in everything is to "fall down and worship" the devil and Satan; for in our natural selfhood are all the evils and falsities which the evil spirits love to excite, and when we set up self as the most important thing in life, we open the door to evil and come under the rule of the hells. When this temptation comes to us—as it does every day of our lives—we must remember that no matter what the appearance may be, our only salvation is to deny self, to look to the Lord for guidance and strength, and to obey Him: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

In each temptation the Lord's answer was a quotation from

Scripture. This shows us the right way to meet temptation. Quoting Scripture does two things for us: it reminds us that however trivial the particular temptation may seem, it is really important, for it is a choice between the Lord and the devil; and it opens a way in our minds for the Lord to come in and help us. Recall that the Word is really like Jacob's ladder, with angels ascending and descending upon it—that is, our thoughts going up to the Lord at the top and the Lord's thoughts coming down to us at the foot, where the ladder connects with the ground, or the letter of the Word in our minds. When we quote Scripture in answer to temptation, we are setting up this "ladder," meeting temptation in the Lord's strength in this way, we feel the peace and satisfaction which come only from the Lord and the angels: "Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him."

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 1690: "That the Lord's life, from His earliest childhood even to the last hour of His life in the world, was continual temptation and continual victory, is evident from many things in the Word of the Old Testament; and that it did not cease with the temptation in the wilderness is evident from what is said in Luke: 'And when the devil had completed every temptation, he departed from Him for a season' (4:13); as also from the fact that He was tempted even to the death on the cross, and thus to the last hour of His life in the world . . . The last was when He prayed on the cross for His enemies, and thus for all in the whole world. In the Word of the Lord's life, in the Gospels, none but the last is mentioned, except His temptation in the wilderness. More was not disclosed to the disciples. The things that were disclosed appear in the sense of the letter so slight as to be scarcely anything . . . when yet His temptation was more grievous than can ever be comprehended and believed by any human mind . . . The temptation that is related in Matthew . . . contains all temptations in a summary; namely, that from love toward the whole human race, the Lord fought against the loves of self and the world, with which the hells were filled. All temptation is an assault upon the love in which the man is, and the temptation is in the same degree as is the love. If the love is not assaulted, there is no temptation. To destroy anyone's love is to destroy his very life; for the love is the life. The Lord's life was love toward the whole human race, and was indeed so great, and of such

a quality, as to be nothing but pure love . . . The love which was the Lord's veriest life is signified by His 'hungering' . . . That He fought against the love of the world, or all things that are of the love of the world, is signified by: 'The devil took him into a high mountain (etc.)' . . . That He fought against the love of self, and all things that are of the love of self, is signified by this: 'The devil took him into the holy city (etc.)' . . . Continual victory is signified by its being said that after the temptations, 'angels came and ministered unto him.' "

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Who came before the Lord to prepare His way? *John the Baptist*
J. Where did John the Baptist live? *wilderness of Judea*
P. What can you tell about his clothing and food? *camel hair; locusts, wild honey*
J. What was his message? *Repent!*
J. What did he say when the Lord came to him to be baptized? *I need to be baptized by you*
J. What did the Lord answer? *it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness*
P. What came down from heaven when the Lord was baptized? *a dove*
J. What did the voice from heaven say? *This is my beloved Son*
J. Where did the Lord go after He was baptized? *wilderness*
P. How long was He in the wilderness? *forty days*
P. Who tempted Him there? "*the devil*"
P. What was the first temptation? *stones to bread*
J. What was the second temptation? *throw self down*
J. What was the third temptation? *worship devil*
P. How did the Lord answer each time? "*It is written . . .*"
P. What four words can we say whenever we are tempted to do wrong?
 "*Get thee hence, Satan*"
P. Who came and ministered to the Lord when His temptations were over?
 angels
I. What do the three temptations mean? (1) *to be satisfied with natural idea of good*, (2) *to expect the Lord to save us in spite of our folly*, (3) *to give up the effort to learn and do the Lord's will*
S. Why was the Lord tempted? *to glorify His humanity*

THE FIRST DISCIPLES

Matthew 4:12-25

All the classes should be taught the meaning of the two words *disciple* and *apostle*.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord can do for us spiritually through the Word the same miracles which He performed for men physically while He was on earth.

We need to forsake our own ideas and follow the Lord wholly if we are to be His disciples.

Notes for Parents

For our historical knowledge of the Lord's life on earth we should note that when He began His public ministry, He left Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and went to live in Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

We all recognize water as a symbol of truth and can easily understand that a sea is a picture of truth gathered together in one place—in our memory. There are two principal seas in the Holy Land which are mentioned often in the Bible story, the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. As the river Jordan is a symbol of truth from the Lord flowing down into the minds of men—the word *Jordan* means “descender”—we may think of these two seas as knowledge of the Word of the Lord in the minds of men of two different levels of character. The Jordan empties into the Dead Sea. The Word in its letter is so written that even a completely depraved person can read it and see what its teaching is. But in his mind it is stagnant and produces no life. There are no fish in the Dead Sea. The Sea of Galilee, on the other hand, is full of fish. Fishing boats are always on its surface, and many of those who live on its shores make their living by fishing. In the mind of a man who has not destroyed his

spiritual capacity, the Word is full of living truths waiting to be drawn out and put to use.

This is why the Lord lived at Capernaum during the three years of His ministry and why the first disciples He called were fishermen. Peter and Andrew, James and John are names familiar to all of us. Peter, James, and John were to become the Lord's constant companions, the ones who were permitted to see Him transfigured. They were not learned men nor important people in the eyes of the world. What did the Lord see in them? The simple story of our chapter answers this question. They recognized the Lord, and when He said, "Follow me," they were willing immediately to leave all their own concerns and interests and to obey Him. So they became His first disciples (or "learners") and later His apostles —those "sent out" to carry to the world the good news of salvation.

There are three steps here which we should recognize as necessary for all of us who call ourselves Christians. First we must recognize the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the "anointed one," God Himself come into the world. Then we must be ready to leave our concern with self and our worldly ambitions and follow the Lord by learning the truths He teaches us in the Word and obeying them. Finally we must be eager to do all we can to bring the Gospel, the "good news," to others by the character of our daily lives, by our conversation, and by supporting our church in its efforts to reach both those near at hand and the wider audience which we cannot reach as individuals.

We are all, if we mean to live good lives, fishermen by the Sea of Galilee. And to each one of us the Lord comes with His simple command, "Follow me."

Primary

The simple story is easy to tell the children. Tell them about the Sea of Galilee and try to have them learn the word *Galilee*. Stress the fact that Peter and Andrew were brothers and James and John were brothers, that they were all fishermen, and that Peter had two names. Describe the difference between fishing with a hook and fishing with nets, and be prepared with a simple ex-

planation of what the Lord meant when He told them He would make them fishers of men. Tell the children that the Lord calls every one of us to follow Him and that we should be as willing as these first four disciples.

You remember that the Lord was born in Bethlehem. This was in the southern division of the Holy Land. Now do you remember where He grew up? It was in Nazareth, in the northern division. The Lord lived quietly in Nazareth until He was about thirty years old. Then He appeared before the people and began His public ministry. And He changed His home to a place called Capernaum.

Capernaum was also in the northern division of the land, the division known as Galilee, but it was on the eastern border of the land on the coast of the Sea of Galilee. Many of the people of Capernaum were fishermen, who owned boats on the Sea of Galilee and made their living by selling the fish they caught.

Our story today is about Jesus and four of these fishermen.

What did the Lord tell them?

Did they obey Him?

What two other brothers did He then see?

What were they doing?

What did they do when He called them?

These first four disciples are the ones about whom we read most in the Gospels.

They went everywhere with the Lord and He taught them.

Disciple means a "learner" or pupil.

Verse 23 tells three kinds of things which the Lord did in His ministry.

What were they?

What were some of the troubles the people had who came to Him to be healed?

Do you know that the Lord wants every one of us to be His disciple?

When you come to Sunday school, you are learning about the Lord, aren't you?

The Lord calls every one of us to follow Him just as He did Peter and Andrew and James and John.

Junior

The geography of Galilee is important for this class. Review the three divisions of the Holy Land and the cities especially associated with the Lord's life. Have the class look up the prophecy (Isaiah 9:1-2) quoted in our chapter and see how it is fulfilled in this lesson.

Where was the Lord born?

Where did He grow up?

The Lord was about thirty years old when He came from Nazareth to the Jordan to John to be baptized. Then followed the forty days in the wilderness, and after that He was ready to begin His ministry. He did not go back to Nazareth to live, the reason being given in the Gospel of Luke (4:16-32).

Where did He go instead?

Where is Capernaum?

This was to be His headquarters during the remaining years of His earthly life.

The Sea of Galilee plays a considerable part in the Gospel story. You know that water pictures truth. A sea pictures knowledges gathered together in the memory, and the fish in it picture our affection for such knowledges. We all like to learn, even though sometimes we do not want to learn the things which are best for us to know. And we like to pull out of our memories the things we love best to think about. This is like fishing. The first four disciples were fishermen.

What were their names?

By what other name was Simon better known?

Read Matthew 16:13-18 to see how he got this name. *Peter* means a stone or rock. (See also John 1:42.)

When the Lord called Peter and Andrew, what did He tell them He would make of them?

This means that they would be able to draw out those who would really love the truth and obey it from among the great body of people for whom religion was a mere matter of memory knowledge.

These first four men whom the Lord called to follow Him were to become apostles. *Apostle* means "one sent forth." The Lord was to send them forth into the world to preach His gospel, or "good news," and to found the Christian Church. But first they must be disciples. A *disciple* is a learner or pupil. They went with the Lord everywhere, watching what He did and listening to His teaching.

In verse 23 we are told the three things which the Lord did in His ministry.

What were they?

What different kinds of ailments are described in verse 24?

If you think about it, you will see that these were troubles on the three different planes of life: will, thought, and act.

Which affected the will?

Which affected the thought?

Which affected the act?

Study a map of the Holy Land and see where Capernaum is and also some of the places mentioned in verse 25. *Decapolis* means "ten cities." It was the name of a Roman province embracing territory in both Palestine and Syria, east of the Jordan.

Some people followed the Lord just to be healed. But the four disciples were not sick. Why do you think they obeyed so quickly when He called them to follow Him? It was because they were good men and looking eagerly for the promised Messiah and so they were able to recognize Him when they saw Him, and they wanted nothing so much as to follow Him and learn of Him. You know there are two kinds of people in the world: those who just want to have their own way and get all they can for themselves, and those who want to find out what is right and do it and help other people. Each of us has to choose which kind of person he will be. The Lord calls each one of us to follow Him just as He called Peter and Andrew and James and John. And He is ready to teach us just as He taught them.

Where does He call us and teach us?

We should each want to obey His call as promptly as they did. And like them we must be disciples first, and soon we shall find that we are also apostles, for other people will be inspired to learn of Him, too, because our lives will show what His teaching can do for a man or woman.

Intermediate

The correspondence of the sea and of fishing, boats, and nets should be discussed, stressing the difference between our own ideas and those of the Lord in connection with the meaning of discipleship.

The names Peter, James, and John are familiar to us all. They were the three who were closest to the Lord through the three years of His ministry. With Peter's brother Andrew, they were the first ones He called to follow Him.

Their home was at Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee and they were all fishermen. This was not an accident. The sea pictures knowledge gathered in the memory. Fish picture affections for such knowledge. Spiritual fishermen are those who love to draw up out of memory such knowledges as may be useful for life. It is these who hear the call of the Lord. When the Lord first saw them, the four men were in their ships. Two of them were "casting a net into the sea," and the other two were "mending their nets." Swedenborg tells us that a ship represents "doctrine," and that nets also represent doctrine. What is doctrine? It is simply teaching, truth formulated so that it can be expressed in words. It has sometimes been popular to say to ministers and Sunday school teachers, "Don't talk doctrine; talk about life and goodness." But when we talk about life and goodness, we are talking doctrine. Talking about charity and goodness is not charity and goodness, but doctrine. We can't say anything without talking doctrine. What we need to be sure of is that our doctrine is true and not false, and that means that it comes from the Lord and not from self. For we sometimes tell people as truth the things we want to believe, without stopping to find out whether or not they are really true.

Doctrine is represented in the Word by different kinds of containers, depending on the particular use which the doctrine is to serve. See if you can think out what the difference would be between doctrine as a ship and doctrine as a net. The ships in which the first disciples were sitting before they heard the Lord's call picture the general doctrines of the church in which they had been brought up. Their nets picture the ideas they had woven for

themselves "to catch fish," that is, to make their knowledges useful in their daily life. They were called by the Lord to leave their ships and their nets and follow Him; that is, to turn from their religious doctrine and from their own ideas and go with Him to see what He would do for people and to listen to His teaching. The same call comes to us every day of our lives, the call to leave our natural ways of thinking and our own ideas and recognize the Lord as our leader and teacher.

The chapter goes on to tell some of the things the Lord did. Study verse 23 carefully. You will see that the Lord did three things: He preached, He taught, and He healed. Now study verse 24 and think what were the different kinds of trouble people brought to Him for healing and what spiritual troubles they represent. We are sick in soul whenever we are unhappy or afraid or filled with hateful thoughts and feelings. We are possessed with devils when we can't seem to control our temper or our dislikes or our desire to hurt people. Whenever we cannot see why we should not always have our own way, we are lunatic. And whenever we just can't seem to do right no matter how hard we try, we have the palsy. Every weakness and disease mentioned in the Word has a particular meaning.

People of all kinds followed the Lord. It makes no difference whether we are rich or poor, bright or dull, black or white; we can all be followers of the Lord. He loves each one of us just as much as any other, and can help us in whatever way we need help. Through the Word He preaches, teaches, and heals today just as He did long ago in Galilee. And today by means of the wonderful things He has revealed to us in the Word by His Second Coming, we can understand His teaching much better than the early disciples did. They saw and heard Him in the flesh, but we can see and hear Him in the spirit—with our minds and hearts.

Basic Correspondences

fish = affections for memory-knowledge

a ship = doctrine in general

a net = doctrine we construct for our own use
disease in general = any disorder in the soul
possession by devils = control by our selfish and evil desires
lunacy = imagining we are the center of the universe and that we do not need to learn of the Lord and obey Him
palsy = the inability to carry out our good intentions steadily

Senior

The necessity of learning truth from the Word and following the Lord instead of our own ideas is the important subject for discussion. If we start with a false premise, the more we think the further we shall get from the truth. To "follow" the Lord is our first duty as Christians.

The Lord entered upon His public ministry at the age of thirty, and for three years He went about among men, as our chapter tells us, "teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people." We read in this brief statement a summary of His ministry to the mind, the heart, and the outward life, not only to the people of Palestine two thousand years ago, but to all men in all time—to us today.

At the very beginning of His ministry He called His first four disciples, who were all later to be apostles also. The twelve apostles, like the twelve sons of Jacob, represent all our faculties and affections. The Lord calls them all to follow Him, calls them from their worldly preoccupations to concern for spiritual and living things, calls them first to be disciples, "learners," and then to go forth as apostles to help build the kingdom of heaven on earth. We should all desire to be apostles of the Lord, to bring the good news of salvation to all who need and want it. But we must be disciples first. For our own ideas of what is right and best are not the Gospel, and have no saving power for us or for anyone else.

The first disciples were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. A sea represents knowledge stored in the memory; and fish, the affection

for knowledge for its own sake. A ship represents doctrine in general—in the case of the four fishermen the doctrine of the church in which they had been brought up—and the nets, man-made ways of thought by which one draws from his memory what he most wants. There are many doctrines and many such systems of thought or philosophies in the world, and men are constantly busy “mending their nets.” But the Lord calls us to follow Him, to learn of Him instead of looking to our own minds for light. And if we can read the lesson of the Word, we shall be like those first four who “straightway left their nets, and followed Him.”

For the Lord speaks to us in His Word as clearly as He spoke to those who heard Him with their physical ears, and in these days of the Second Coming much more clearly and intelligibly. In John 8:31-32 He tells us: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” The truth which makes us free is not the reasonings of men but the truth as we find it in the Word. The reasonings of men, even of very learned men, are often based on false premises—the fundamental false premise being that men can discover the truth for themselves without looking to the Lord for light. And when we start with this fundamental false premise, we are not free: we are bound by our own limitations and by the appearances in the physical world around us. Our minds cannot rise above the plane of the natural world. And it is only by rising above the natural plane that we can see this world and our lives here in their true proportions and relations. This the Lord’s truth enables us to do.

When the Lord stood on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and called four simple fishermen to leave their nets and follow Him, no one could have imagined that by obeying His call they would become world-famous figures, founders of the Christian Church, which was to change the whole face of civilization. It does not seem to us that by looking to the Lord in the Word for guidance instead of to ourselves and “modern thought,” we shall travel further and accomplish more in the long run, but we should remember that “the long run” is eternity, and eternity is much

more important than anything we can get for ourselves in this world.

Adult

The meaning of the first four disciples, the order in which they are named, and the result of their call are all very important. The expression "fishers of men" should be developed in connection with the meaning of fish and fishing to give us a specific instead of a general idea of what the nature of our missionary efforts should be. If we ourselves have been in the habit of drawing living truths for use in our lives out of our memory-knowledge of the Word by means of the doctrines of our church, we shall be able to apply the same technique for the benefit of others. But it is essential that we recognize that we must all be disciples before we can be worthy apostles.

The Lord, by means of victories over temptations, brought His divine power down into the very outmost plane of His life on earth. This is pictured by His removal from Nazareth to Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The sea pictures knowledges collected in the memory; and fish, the affections for such knowledges which can give them life and make them of use. So the Lord's first four disciples were fishermen, men who were symbolically trying to find truths for life in such knowledges as they had. When the Lord called them, they immediately recognized Him as the living truth and left their nets—that is, their own philosophies which they had been using—and followed Him. The Lord promised to make them fishers of men—to give them real spiritual truths in place of the natural truth on which they had been living. In a less interior sense, they became fishers of men when they went out to draw others into the Lord's kingdom by the preaching of the Gospel.

The first four disciples were to become the best known of the twelve apostles. The apostles, like the twelve sons of Jacob, represent all the capacities in us which may be brought into the service of the Lord, that is, turned from natural to spiritual ends. In AE 820-821 (see below) we have perhaps the clearest and most complete statement of the meaning of the first four disciples and of their relation to the Lord. The accounts of their call given in

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are substantially the same. The order of their call is similar to the order of birth of the first four sons of Jacob. Peter, like Reuben, represents truth or faith. In the Gospel of John (1:35-42) Andrew is represented as having been a disciple of John the Baptist and as having through him recognized the Lord and then informed his brother Simon. This is given to teach us that truth, or faith, to be of real service must be sought from a desire to obey it; so Andrew actually precedes Peter in time. After his call, however, he virtually disappears from the Bible story, just as Simeon in the later history of the Old Testament seems to merge into Judah. And is not this exactly the true picture? Our early desire to obey the Lord becomes, if we regenerate, the life of charity. James, like Levi, represents charity, and John represents the works of charity.

Swedenborg tells us that if our life develops in its true order from the desire to obey into the love of divine truth, then into the love of good or charity, and finally into genuine good works, the good works contain all the other qualities; this also explains why John was loved more than the others by the Lord. But we must not forget the true order of development. Good works—in the ordinary sense of external good deeds—done from any other motive than love to the Lord and obedience to His commandments, are not genuinely good. Swedenborg compares them to artificial fruit “which in external form appears like fruit from a tree, although it is colored wax containing within it dust or bitumen” (DP 215¹³). Peter, James, and John, representing the reception of the Lord in thought, will, and act, became naturally the three who were closest to the Lord and who were allowed to witness things not seen by the others. To them were told the things to come, even though the individual men, as we know from the Gospel story itself, often did not understand or even remember what was told them.

The Lord’s work in Galilee, summed up in verse 23, pictures His work in the external plane of our lives when we turn to Him for help in temptation. First He calls His disciples—makes use of all our qualities. Then He teaches in the synagogues—shows us true

doctrine while we are in a state to receive it. He preaches the gospel of the kingdom—shows us the beauty and happiness of a life according to His laws. Finally He heals all manner of sickness and disease among the people—He helps us to overcome the bad habits and false thoughts which stand in the way of our spiritual health. Even the interests and activities in our lives which apparently have had no connection with our religion come to the Lord to be put right; these are the people from beyond Jordan.

Three types of sickness are specifically mentioned, and we can see that these picture evils in the three planes: those possessed with devils represent evils in the heart; the lunatic are falsities in the mind; and those that had the palsy picture the bad habits of conduct that make it difficult for us to carry out our good desires. All the good effects of the Lord's spirit follow in the train of sincere efforts to give up our own way and follow the Lord.

The Lord began His ministry with John's message: "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." It is always at hand if we will do the work of repentance. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." (Revelation 3:20) We open the door by repentance, by seeing our evils and our need of the Lord, and by turning to Him in His Word for guidance and strength.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, nn. 820-821: "The apostle Peter in the Word of the Evangelists means truth from good which is from the Lord, and also in the contrary sense, truth separated from good. And as truth is of faith and good is of charity, 'Peter' also means faith from charity, and again faith separated from charity. For the twelve apostles, like the twelve tribes of Israel, represented the church in respect to all things of it, thus in respect to truths and goods, since all truths are of faith, and goods are of love. In general, Peter, James, and John, represented faith, charity, and the works of charity; and this is why these three followed the Lord more than others . . . when they were together they represented these as one. It is said as one, because without charity there is no faith that is faith; and without works there is no charity that is

charity . . . Peter was the first to be called by the Lord through Andrew, 'Andrew' signifying the obedience of faith; and afterwards James and John were called, and to these the Lord gave a new name. Likewise He took Peter, James, and John up into the mountain when He was transfigured; He also spoke with these three about the consummation of the age, and about His coming; they were also with the Lord in Gethsemane . . . That the Lord gave a new name to James and John is evident in Mark: 'Jesus called James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James, and them he surnamed Boanerges, which is, sons of thunder' (3:17). 'Sons of thunder' signify truths from celestial good . . . As John represented the church in respect to good works, and good works contain all things of love to the Lord and of charity towards the neighbor, John was more loved by the Lord than the others."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Near what sea did the Lord make His home during His ministry? *Galilee*
- J. What was the name of the place where He lived? *Capernaum*
- P. Who were the first four disciples He called? *Peter, Andrew, James, John*
- P. What was their occupation? *fishermen*
- J. What were they doing when they were called? *working with their nets*
- P. What words did the Lord use when He called them? *Follow me!*
- P. What did they do immediately when He said, "Follow me"? *followed Him*
- J. Of what three types of work did the Lord's ministry consist? *teaching, preaching, healing*
- J. What kinds of ailments are mentioned in our lesson? *possession, lunacy, palsy*
- J. Where did the great numbers of people come from who followed the Lord? *all over*
- I. What does the sea represent? *knowledge gathered in the memory*
- I. What do fish represent? *affection for such knowledge*
- S. What is meant by being "fishers of men"? *to draw others into the Lord's kingdom*

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Matthew 5; 6; 7

The teacher should be sure the children know the answers to the suggested questions on the lesson at their grade level and any other points mentioned in their own notes. Then take up some of the practical lessons suggested in the Adult notes. The teacher should study these beforehand, picking out and marking the particular verse or verses in the text which express each point. Take these up with the children, having them read them if they are able. Spend more time on any which seem particularly to strike the pupils. You may not be able to get through all of them, as you should leave at least five minutes for the closing parable, but you will be able to do enough to show the children how much there is in the sermon on the mount, and to encourage them to study it for themselves. Be sure they know what is the famous passage in each of the three chapters.

Doctrinal Points

Character must be built on the Lord's truth.

The Blessings are the rules for happiness given by the Lord Himself.

Notes for Parents

We are told in Matthew 4:23 that the Lord in His ministry went about teaching, preaching, and healing; so no doubt He preached many sermons. We think of most of His discourses as teaching, and indeed our lesson for today says, "He opened his mouth and taught them, saying." But this lesson is always called "The Sermon on the Mount."

The mountain in Galilee pictures a spiritual outlook upon our life in the world. How different such an outlook is from our natural one is proved by the difference between our natural ideas of what is good for us and the teaching the Lord gives us in this

sermon. The sermon begins with the Blessings, and we remember that *blessed* means "happy." Read through the Blessings and ask yourself if people in general would say that any of the conditions mentioned in them would be likely to make one happy. Yet this is the Lord speaking to us, and the Lord knows. Even the people who listened to the sermon from the Lord's own lips so many hundreds of years ago realized that He was telling them what was unquestionably the truth, as we learn in the last verse of chapter 7. Each of us should ask himself very seriously, "Is it the part of wisdom for me to go on looking at my life and those of others from the point of view of this world when the Lord Himself has told me plainly that an entirely different point of view is the right one and the only one which can lead to eternal happiness?"

In each of the three chapters of the sermon there is one very famous passage. In chapter 5 it is the Blessings. In chapter 6 it is the Lord's Prayer. In chapter 7 it is the Golden Rule. And in addition to these we have verse after verse of plain, practical instruction, covering all our common experiences and problems. We are told, for example, that it is useless to know what is right if we do not do it, that the ten commandments are the fundamental laws of a good life for all time regardless of changing conditions in the world, that a good external life is not enough—the heart must be right, that love which is given only to those who will return it is not true love at all but really self-love, that the ideal for which we should constantly strive must be nothing less than the perfect example given us in the Lord's life, that we should not expect a reward in heaven for good we do to be seen of men, that we should not be disturbed if we do not have worldly success and that we should not worry about our future in the world, that we should be critical of ourselves rather than of other people, that we should be sincere in following the Lord and not excuse ourselves when we do what we know is wrong.

A minister could find enough material for many sermons in every verse of this one sermon of the Lord. And its final parable sums up in a very vivid picture all that the Lord is trying to do for

us in it—to show us the solid rock of divine truth on which we should build the house of our character, and to warn us and save us from the inevitable destruction that will come if we persist in building on the shifting sands of human opinion.

Primary

The younger children will like to think of the Lord sitting on the mountain with the people gathered around Him. Be sure they understand that *blessed* means "happy," and that the Lord wants us to be happy and is telling us how in this sermon. After speaking of the sermon in general, read rapidly through your list of verses with just a word about each, and then discuss the parable at the end and its meaning.

When you go to church, the minister preaches a sermon, doesn't he? Often you cannot understand what he is saying because you are still a little child, but you will find that as you grow older, you will understand more and more. In his sermon the minister is trying to help people to understand what the Lord tells us in His Word.

When the Lord was on earth, He preached sermons, too. The longest of them that is written down for us in the Bible is called "The Sermon on the Mount."

How does the sermon on the mount begin?

What does *blessed* mean?

In the Blessings the Lord is telling us the things which can really make us happy.

The sermon on the mount is full of beautiful, wise teachings.

It fills chapters 5, 6, and 7 of the Gospel of Matthew.

In chapter 6 we find the Lord's Prayer.

In chapter 7 we find the Golden Rule.

And the sermon on the mount ends with a wonderful parable. A parable is a story with another meaning inside of it. Let us read this one. [Read Matthew 7:24-27.] I wonder if you can see what the inside meaning of this story is. You know that each one of us lives in a house, but we didn't build this house, and sometimes we move out of one house and into another. But each of us has another kind of house to live in that he does build himself and

that he always stays in, although he makes changes in it from day to day. This house is called our character. You are always yourself, even though sometimes you like to play you are somebody else. The house of our character is built by what we feel and think and do from day to day. It is built on a firm rock if it is built on the truth as the Lord gives it to us in His Word. But if we build our character on our own ideas of what is good for us or on the ideas of the other children we play with, our house is built on the sand, because these ideas are changing all the time and are often wrong. Now do you remember our lesson about temptations? The storms that beat against the house of our character are our temptations. Can you see what the parable teaches?

When the Lord finished speaking, how did the people feel about what He said? Why were they surprised?

The Lord spoke with authority because He was God, but most of the people did not know this.

Junior

Discuss the sermon as a whole first, explaining the three parts and what is in each. Then speak of the Blessings as the key to the whole teaching of the Lord, the positive side of the commandments. The Juniors are coming into an age when a challenge to right feeling and conduct may be much more effective than prohibitions. They should understand that both are necessary, but that the really happy life is one which has the Lord's unselfish spirit at its heart. Then go through the specific lessons and end with the parable.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 of the Gospel of Matthew are called the sermon on the mount. Why?

In the Scriptures many other wonderful things happened on mountains. The commandments were given from Mount Sinai. Jesus went up into a mountain to pray. He took His three closest disciples up into a mountain to see Him transfigured. And you remember that the test Elijah proposed and carried through was performed on Mount Carmel. This is because a mountain top is a picture of a high state of thought and feeling, a state when we are near the Lord and can look down on our everyday life and see it in

its true proportions. So when the Lord saw how much the people needed His teaching, He took them up with Him into a mountain. For when the Lord saw the multitudes, He saw not only their bodies but also their souls.

The sermon on the mount is not long, but there is so much in it that it would take a whole year's lessons to study its teachings one by one. You will want to do that for yourselves. But you should know and remember that in each of its three chapters there is one especially well-known passage: in chapter 5 it is the Blessings, in chapter 6 the Lord's Prayer, and in chapter 7 the Golden Rule.

The sermon begins with the Blessings. *Blessed*, as we learned in our lesson on the first Psalm, means "happy." Many people may not think that the states the Lord in this sermon calls blessed would really make them happy. They think happiness comes from pleasures, success in their occupations, popularity, wealth, and influence. But we know that people may have all these worldly things and yet not be happy. Happiness comes from the Lord; it is His unselfish spirit felt in our own hearts. When we think about ourselves all the time and want other people to be doing things for us, we are never happy because we are always wanting more, and often wanting things we cannot have. Only forgetting ourselves and loving to help others brings real happiness. This is what the Blessings teach us.

The sermon gives us many examples of what we must do if we wish to develop the qualities which bring happiness. We must prove that we really want to serve the Lord by doing what He says is right, by keeping the commandments. We must not let resentment or anger stay in our hearts. We must be kind and forgiving when people injure us. We must not praise ourselves for the good we do or try to tell other people about it so that they will praise us. We must think more of being good than of being successful in the world. We must trust the Lord for our future and not worry about what may happen to us. We must not find fault with other people without first looking for our own faults.

What parable do we find near the end of the sermon?

What is a parable?

In this parable the house is our character. The rock on which we should build it is the Lord's truth. The sand is our own opinions or the opinions of others who do not study the Lord's truth to find the way of life. The rain and the floods and the wind are all the temptations and trials which come to us in our lives. These come to the good and the evil alike.

What happened to the house built on the rock when the storm came?

What happened to the house built on the sand?

Why were the people astonished at the Lord's teaching?

The Lord could speak with authority because He was God Himself.

Intermediate

The emphasis should be on the necessity of looking to the Lord for guidance instead of to self. The verses listed may be studied with this thought in mind, ending with the parable and the thought that the Lord is the only one who can speak "with authority."

A mountain represents a high plane of thought and feeling, near to the Lord, and Galilee represents our everyday life in the world. If we are to see our life in its true proportions, we must lift our minds above the level of worldly efforts and ambitions. Unless we can do this we cannot understand the Lord's teaching in this sermon on the mount.

The sermon begins with the statement of the qualities of life which lead to happiness. *Blessed*, as we may remember from our lesson on the first Psalm, means "happy." These are not the qualities which most people think will bring happiness. We are likely to think that we would be happy if we had physical beauty, unusual strength, self-confidence, business ability, money, or genius of some kind. Such things seem to us the best things to be born with and to strive for. These may indeed bring what the world calls success, but we find that the people who have them are by no means always happy. In the Blessings the Lord gives us the only sure rules for happiness. Read verse 17. The Blessings fulfill the

commandments; the qualities they describe are the result of keeping the commandments because we wish to serve the Lord. Isaiah says: "Cease to do evil; learn to do well."

All the other teachings of the sermon are practical examples illustrating the working out in daily life of the qualities described in the Blessings. Read the rest of the sermon, noting how the Lord continually points out the need of making the inner life right. The sermon must be studied a little at a time because there is so much in it. But we need to remember that there is one especially well-known passage in each of the three chapters: the Blessings in chapter 5, the Lord's Prayer in chapter 6, and the Golden Rule in chapter 7. Almost every verse in the whole sermon is probably familiar to us because we have heard it quoted or used as a sermon text. Each teaching in the sermon challenges our thought and leads us to examine ourselves. Sometimes we, like the people who heard the sermon, are astonished at the Lord's teaching. We say immediately, for example, "how can the 'poor in spirit' be happy?" This is because we identify "poor in spirit" with "poor-spirited" or cowardly. This is not what the Lord means. The poor in spirit are simply those who do not think too much of themselves and so are willing to look to the Lord for guidance, the people who realize how weak they really are and how much they need the Lord's help. The same is meant by "the poor" all through the Word. In the same way, "they that mourn" are those who truly regret their own evils and are trying to improve, and the "meek" are those who would rather be injured themselves than be the cause of injury to others. We might go through the whole sermon in this way, trying to see what the Lord means instead of putting our own ideas into His words.

The parable of the house on the rock and the house on the sand is a fitting close to the sermon. The house is our character. The rock is the Lord's truth. The sand is the opinions of men. The rain and floods and wind are the temptations and trials which come in the life of everyone, good and bad alike. If we build our character on belief in the Lord and His Word, trying always to feel as He

tells us to feel, think as He tells us to think, and act as He tells us to act, we shall be able to meet trial and temptation, bereavement and disappointment with unshaken trust, knowing that whatever the Lord permits to come to us He permits for our eternal good, and we shall be happy all along the way because the Lord will be dwelling in our house, and His unselfish love, which is happiness, will be in our hearts. Try always to remember that happiness is a quality of feeling, and that it comes from within, never from outside.

The Lord could speak as "one having authority" because He had the authority. He was God. He knew.

Basic Correspondences

sand = the opinions of men

storms = trials and temptations

Senior

After a general statement about the sermon as a whole and the best known passages in it, take up your list of verses, stopping on any passage which the class seems inclined to discuss. The important thing is to lead the young people to realize how much is in the sermon and to arouse in them a desire to study it for themselves.

The sermon on the mount occupies three chapters in the Gospel of Matthew. A much shorter form is found in the sixth chapter of Luke. In Matthew it begins with the Blessings and contains also the Lord's Prayer and the Golden Rule. It is so packed with lessons that one might write endlessly upon it, and we can touch on only a few points. Each one of us must study the sermon all his life, and will always find in it new food for thought.

"And seeing the multitudes He went up into a mountain." The Lord saw more than the bodies of the throng of people. He saw their souls and their spiritual weaknesses and needs. So He took them up with Him onto a mountain. Going up on a mountain pictures lifting our thoughts above the plane of worldly ideas to a spiritual level.

First the Lord gave the rules for happiness, the qualities which must be cultivated if we are to know "that peace which the world cannot give." No wonder the people were astonished! These were certainly not the qualities which the people themselves would have named as the essentials of happiness, nor those most of us today would name. In fact, we naturally think of many of them as qualities which are connected with unhappiness. But the people who went up to the mountain with the Lord were willing to be taught. He called them "the salt of the earth." Salt, whose chemical property is to combine different elements, represents the desire to unite truth and good in life. These people wanted to be good, but they had lost the way of life and so were not walking in the way which would lead them to heaven. The salt had "lost its savor."

So Jesus pointed them steadily toward God as the only source of truth and goodness. He told them that the commandments must be kept literally, that not one jot or tittle of the Law could fail—and this is equally true today—but He also showed them that it is not enough merely to keep the Law outwardly.

Then He rehearsed some of the commandments as they were interpreted and twisted by the scribes and Pharisees, and in each case He added the new teaching that the spirit or motive must be made pure. He sought to change people's hearts from self-seeking, covetousness, revenge, lust, and hatred to gentleness, mercy, forgiveness, purity, and humility. Only in this way could the virtues named in the Beatitudes be developed.

The last verse of chapter 5 is often questioned. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Can any finite person be perfect? Does the Lord expect it of us? The Word itself gives the answer: "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." But He sets before us an ideal which is the only adequate ideal to strive for. The moment we say to ourselves, "I can't be perfect; so it is of no use to try," or fall into the habit of excusing our known faults by saying, "Well, nobody is perfect," we stop progressing spiritually. If our goal were an attainable ideal, we might attain it and have nothing left to work for or

to look forward to. But if we take the perfect divine life as our pattern, we may progress to eternity. The Lord is the only one who can speak with authority, whose teaching is unalterably true. It is He and not our neighbors to whom we should look for guidance.

The closing parable of the house on the rock and the house on the sand sums up the whole teaching of the sermon in a very vivid picture. The house stands for our character. The rock on which it should be built is the Lord's truth as He gives it to us in His Word. The sand is the shifting and unstable opinions of men. The storms are our temptations and trials, which come to good and bad alike. We individually have to make the decision, but the Lord tells us what the wise decision is. As you go to college and out into the world, the opinions of men will often be presented to you in very forceful and persuasive terms. You may even be ridiculed for believing in the Lord instead of in "modern scholarship." But remember what the Psalmist says: "I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation."

Adult

Begin by reading the first verse of chapter 5 and commenting on its meaning. Then suggest that the sermon presents us with a real challenge and take up as many of its statements as you have time for.

Although the sermon on the mount is shorter in actual reading time than most modern sermons, it is so packed with lessons both natural and spiritual that it affords material for many sermons. To the people who listened to it, its teaching was absolutely new; even those of them who knew something of the Scriptures had lost the perception that they taught such things as these. It is a curious fact that although centuries have passed since this sermon was given and although men have read and studied it throughout those centuries, its lessons still seem new when we examine them honestly in comparison with our current thought and practice. For example, most of us doubtless know the Blessings; we acknowledge them as the Lord's rules of life and repeat them often. But have they ever

become accepted principles in our own lives? Do we really believe that the humble-minded, the mourning, the meek, the persecuted are the happy people? Yet the Lord tells us that this is true. It is so opposite to the commonly accepted methods of seeking happiness that it is startling even after centuries of familiarity with the words.

The same is true of every lesson in the sermon on the mount: each one is diametrically opposed to what we tend naturally to believe and to practice. Perhaps nothing shows us so clearly as this how perverted our natural heredity is. This is what the first verse of the fifth chapter tells us: the Lord, "seeing the multitudes," went up into a mountain and taught them. The Lord saw the multitudes not as we see them but as they were in their hearts and minds. He saw their evils and their ignorance which were leading them to destruction. He saw their dire need of knowledge of the true way of life and of divine help in leading it. He went up into a mountain as a symbol of the fact that their thoughts must be lifted above the level on which they were accustomed to think. Then He proceeded to give them definite practical instruction as to how they must change their lives, how they must learn to act, to think, and to feel if they wished to be really happy or "blessed." He did not hesitate to be specific, to be dogmatic. He did not quibble or compromise or suggest. He told them plainly what was so.

And we read that the people were "astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority." We are all among the multitude to whom the Lord preached the sermon on the mount. We need to follow Him up into the mountain of spiritual thinking and to learn the way of life from the only one having authority. It may seem to us that self-seeking, self-confidence, force, ruthlessness will bring success in life, but it is not so; they will bring unrest, confusion, pain, disappointment, destruction. The Lord Himself tells us so. True and lasting happiness comes only to those who are humble, pure, peace-loving, and steadfast in righteousness.

Let us see if we can list some of the practical lessons in the sermon:

Knowledge of the truth is useless unless we live according to it. It is like salt which has lost its savor or like a light which is hidden.

The commandments are eternally true and necessary. No changing conditions, no special circumstances make it right to break them. The Lord Himself was not superior to them: He fulfilled them in every detail.

It is not enough to keep the letter of the law: we must keep its spirit in our hearts. Hatred is the real sin—murder is only one of its effects.

Love which goes out only to those who return it is self-love. The test of true love is the ability to will and to do good to those who do evil to us.

The Lord should be our ideal of perfection, and we should not take any less perfect life as our pattern.

If we do good for the sake of being praised or admired or rewarded, we should not expect a spiritual reward too; such good does not benefit our souls.

We should not be disturbed if we do not have worldly success; our concern should be to make ourselves more and more what the Lord wishes us to be.

We should not think that we can compromise with evil. We cannot love the Lord and self at the same time.

We should not worry about the future; our business is to do right in the present and trust our future to the Lord.

We should not be critical of other people, but we should be critical of ourselves.

We should try persistently to find out the Lord's will and do it, recognizing that the easy way is not necessarily the right way. There are many wrong ways of doing anything; we should seek the right way.

In thus trying to summarize the lessons taught in the three chapters, we learn to appreciate more than ever the power of the

letter of the Word. For there is no substitute for the actual words of the text, no simpler or more striking way of expressing the thought. We need to read and reread the sermon itself.

The closing parable of the sermon is familiar to us all. The rock is the same rock upon which the Lord told Peter He would found His church, the "cornerstone which the builders rejected," the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ is "God with us." This belief alone gives His words compelling authority in our lives. Our house is our character. We build our house on rock when we form our character according to the Lord's teachings, rejecting our own ideas when they differ from His. Sand is pulverized rock, truth broken up because it has no unifying element to keep it together. We build our house on the sand when we form our character according to the ideas of men, ever-shifting, multitudinous like the sand, giving no promise of permanence or security. The storm beat upon both houses alike. Trials and temptations come to the believer and to the unbeliever. These are the rain and floods and winds which beat upon the two houses. Great worldly prosperity is nowhere promised to the good. But those whose lives are based upon belief in the Lord will weather the storm, while those who rely only on themselves or on other human beings are crushed. Take bereavement as an example. If we believe in the Lord, we know that there is a spiritual world to which our loved ones have immediately gone, the world for which we are all created and where alone we can be safe and happy forever; we know that the Lord loves each one of us and guides all things for our highest good, so that however hard the loss may be for us, it is only temporary and it is somehow necessary; we know that we still have uses to perform in this world or we should not be left here. So, in spite of our natural sorrow, we can go on with our life here cheerfully and hopefully. But the man who does not believe in the Lord has no assurance of any other life than this. What he loses out of this world seems to him gone forever. He sees no use, no wisdom in his bereavement; he wastes his energies bemoaning his loss; his character, having no solid foundation, is further undermined. "And it fell: and great was the fall of it."

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 9207: "'Ye are the salt of the earth . . .' These words the Lord says to the disciples and to the people. By 'the salt of the earth' is meant the truth of the church which longs for good; by 'the salt has lost its savor' is meant truth without any longing for good; that such truth is profitable for nothing is described by 'the salt that hath lost its savor being thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot.' To long for good is to long to do what is good, and in this way to be conjoined with good."

Apocalypse Explained, n. 1193: "When man loves uses by doing them in the first place, the former constitutes his spiritual and the latter his natural; and the spiritual rules, and the natural serves. This is the meaning of the Lord's words in Matthew: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of the heavens and its justice, and all things shall be added unto you' (6:33). 'The kingdom of the heavens' means the Lord and His church, and 'justice' means spiritual, moral, and civil good; and every good that is done from the love of these is a use. Then 'all things shall be added,' because when use is in the first place, the Lord, from whom is all good, is in the first place and rules, and gives whatever contributes to eternal life and happiness; for, as has been said, all things of the Lord's Divine providence pertaining to man look to what is eternal. 'All things that shall be added' refer to food and raiment, because food means everything internal that nourishes the soul, and raiment everything external that like the body clothes it. Everything internal has reference to love and wisdom, and everything external to wealth and eminence. All this makes clear what is meant by loving uses for the sake of uses, and what the uses are from which man has wisdom, from which and according to which wisdom everyone has eminence and wealth in heaven."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. Where did the Lord go after His baptism? *wilderness*
- J. What happened to Him there? *tempted*
- J. How did He answer the devil each time? "*It is written . . .*"
- P. What is our lesson today about? *sermon on the mount*
- P. With what does the sermon on the mount begin? *Blessings (Beatitudes)*
- P. What does *blessed* mean? *happy*
- J. Are the things the Lord calls blessed just what we would expect? *no*
- J. What do they teach is the source of happiness? *the Lord*
- P. How many chapters does the sermon on the mount take up? *three*
- P. What very well-known passage is in the second chapter? *the Lord's prayer*
- P. What one is in the third? *the Golden Rule*

- P. Can you repeat the Golden Rule?
- J. With what parable does the sermon on the mount end? *house built on rock/sand*
- P. What is meant by our “house”? *our character*
- P. What is the “rock” on which it is safe to build? *truth from the Word*
- I. Why are the opinions of men like sand? *shifting, unstable, no unifying element*
- S. Why could the Lord speak with authority? *He had authority*

THE LORD'S MINISTRY

Matthew 8

In a brief course such as a Sunday school course must necessarily be, it is impossible to take up all the Lord's work of preaching, teaching, and healing. This chapter has been chosen as showing the variety of the acts of the Lord in His ministry and something of their significance. With the classes from the Juniors up the discussion of miracles in general is perhaps of primary importance. Doubt of the miracles is so prevalent that even the children will inevitably meet it occasionally, and they should understand as clearly as possible why the miracles were necessary and how it was possible for the Lord to perform them. They can be shown that the ground of doubt of the miracles is not reason but unwillingness to believe. A very general statement of the spiritual meaning of the various miracles in this chapter will be enough to show them the importance of the miracles to the writing of the Word. Questions of disease and healing may be raised even by the Juniors, and the effort has been made in the notes to suggest the basis for answering such questions.

Doctrinal Points

All healing power is in the Lord.

The miracles teach what the Lord can do for our souls.

Every disease in the Word corresponds to some weakness or deformity in the soul.

Notes for Parents

The Lord's ministry consisted of teaching, preaching, and healing. We have chosen chapter 8 for our lesson today because it contains so many examples of His healing.

Today we read and hear and see on television a great deal about "faith healing," and many think that because the Lord healed and

commanded His Apostles to heal, every Christian church should undertake this work.

In the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg we have very clear and reasonable teaching on this point. He tells us that all healing power is in the Lord. This does not mean that we should never go to a doctor or take medicine. Many ailments result from our misuse of the gifts the Lord has given us in the natural world and can be corrected by changing our bad habits to good ones or by the help of various products of nature which the Lord has created for this purpose—this is the field in which doctors work. But we all know that doctors cannot always cure, and also that people sometimes get well whom the doctors have “given up.” The final healing is always under divine providence.

Why then does the Lord not always cure us? We know He loves each one of us and does everything that is best for us. It is because the Lord is primarily concerned with the health of our souls, and a well body does not necessarily mean a healthy soul. If we and everyone else loved the Lord and the neighbor and always knew and chose to obey the divine laws, both spiritual and natural, there would be no sickness, no accidents, no insanity. But we do not. And we often need to be allowed to suffer the consequences of our ignorance, selfishness, and disobedience before we even stop to think. And often innocent children must suffer before the world wakes up to the evils it is committing.

When the Lord was in the world, people had fallen into such depths of ignorance of the Lord’s laws and of any world higher than the material world that only physical proof of the Lord’s power could open their minds. But that is not true today. We are able to think about the Lord and heavenly life whatever our physical condition may be, and when some handicap takes us for a time out of the activities of our ordinary life, we are often led to do this kind of thinking.

We all naturally like to be well, but physical health is not of first importance. Many of the world’s most useful men and women—like Helen Keller, for example—have grown fine and strong through

meeting physical handicaps bravely. We shall all lay these physical bodies of ours aside at death, and the really important thing is the kind of spiritual bodies which will be revealed when we wake in the other world, for we shall live in them to eternity. We are building these spiritual bodies day by day as we choose good or evil.

Primary

Tell the children first the different kinds of wonderful things the Lord did while He was on earth. Go through the various miracles in the chapter in some detail. Be sure the children get the point that it is always the Lord who heals.

Our lesson is about some of the wonderful things the Lord did as He went about among the people. These wonderful things are called miracles.

We do not any of us like to be sick, do we?

When we are sick, the doctor comes and tells us what medicine to take.

But it is really the Lord who heals us by means of the medicine.

Health, like all good things, is a gift from the Lord.

But we all know that some sick people do not get well, however hard they try. It is always the Lord who really does the healing and makes us well, and He always does it if it is best for us. But sometimes He sees that we need some of the lessons that being sick teaches us. See if you can think of some of these—things you find out when you are sick that you would not think of if you were always well. And sometimes, of course, the Lord sees that it is time for a person to be taken to his home in the spiritual world.

Often when the Lord was on earth sick people were brought to Him to be healed, and He did heal many of them. But He knew their hearts and whether it would be best for them to be healed. They also had to have faith in His power to heal them. Those who believed He was the Messiah had this faith.

Can you tell some of the afflictions which the Lord healed?

And our chapter tells us about another wonderful thing the Lord did. (Read Matthew 8:23-27.)

What happened to the ship in which He was sleeping?
What did He say when His disciples woke Him?
Then what did He do?

Have you ever been frightened in a storm? This story shows you that you need not be frightened, for the Lord is always near us and ready to help us if we ask Him. Even though we cannot see Him, we can trust Him always to do what is best for us.

Junior

Stress the need of faith in accomplishing anything, and what true faith in the Lord is. Have the children look up and read Matthew 13:54-58. Try to show them also what our attitude should be toward the problems of physical health —that it is a great blessing if well used but never of first concern.

The Lord's ministry consisted of teaching, preaching, and healing. Our chapter today describes several of the Lord's miracles of healing.

What is a miracle?
How many miracles can you find in this chapter?
Which one of them is not a miracle of healing?

The Lord healed people on one condition. See if you can find out what it was by reading verses 2-3, 10, and 31. All these people believed that the Lord was able to heal them. This meant that they believed He was the Messiah and so had divine power. But not everyone who saw the miracles believed this. Read Matthew 9:34.

There are two kinds of reasons why people are sick. One kind is natural: we know that many diseases come from not keeping clean and from bad eating and living habits, and of course there are accidents. But even in these there is something involved which we cannot see. When the measles are "going around," do all children catch them? Or do accidents happen to everyone? People who obey the laws and who try to be careful of other people seldom cause accidents. Obedience and thoughtfulness are qualities of the mind and heart; that is, they are spiritual qualities. In the case of diseases we often cannot even guess at the spiritual cause, but

there is always is one, and the Lord knows what it is.

When the Lord was in the world, He could act into nature directly and so He could cure the diseases of people whose hearts were good. But He did not do this merely to make their bodies well. He always taught that the soul is more important than the body. He performed miracles for two reasons: to strengthen the faith of those who wanted to believe in Him, and for the sake of the Word. For each miracle is really a parable teaching us of some good work which the Lord can perform in our souls if we believe in Him and ask His help. See if you can think what spiritual weaknesses can be pictured by leprosy, palsy, fever, and possession by devils. When we are not honest and sincere, when we just don't seem to be able to do right even though we want to, when we are "burning up" with resentment against someone, when we seem to be "possessed," as our mothers may say, to get into trouble, we have these afflictions spiritually. And we sometimes say, "I can't help it, I was born that way." We are all born that way, but we can change ourselves with the Lord's help if we ask Him to help us, and do as He tells us.

The miracle of the stilling of the storm also showed that the Lord had complete power over the world of nature. To His disciples this miracle seemed even more wonderful than His miracles of healing. This was probably because they knew even men had some ability to heal disease, but they thought of storms as events about which men could not do anything. We should learn from this miracle that what we call the laws of nature are really God's laws for nature, and that He is always in control. And this miracle has a meaning within it, too. Remember what we learned about the parable of the house on the rock and the house on the sand.

What did the storms picture in that parable?

The storm in our lesson today has the same meaning. When we ask the Lord to help us in our temptations, He will always still the storm for us.

Intermediate

The correspondence of various diseases is important for this class. Discuss examples of spiritual leprosy, palsy, fever, and possession by devils. Lead the young people to think of their faults as spiritual diseases to be brought to the Lord for healing.

We have chosen this chapter because it contains examples of several kinds of miracle. The stilling of the storm shows the Lord's power over inanimate nature. We should remember that the Lord has this power always, and that today it is He who determines what "the weather will be." We are all in the habit of thinking of the weather in terms of our own convenience and pleasure. But the Lord has the needs of all people in mind. He uses nature as one of His tools. The healing of leprosy, palsy, and fever shows His power over the body, the casting out of devils His power in the mind.

We note that the condition of healing was always faith in Him. Even on the natural plane we can see that this must be so: unless we believe that a thing is possible, we do not attempt it. But it is equally true on the plane of our affections and thoughts. One of the commonest mistakes we make is to say, "I can't help it," and "You can't change human nature." The Lord tells us, "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26)

Every disease in the Word corresponds to some particular weakness or deformity of the soul. Spiritual leprosy is "profanation of truth," which means knowing the truth at heart but rejecting it because we do not want to live according to it. Palsy stands for the inability to carry out our good intentions, to walk steadily in the right way. Fever pictures the burning of inner wrong desires. Possession by devils denotes evil thoughts and passions. All these are results of the natural selfishness into which we are born, and that is why they seem too much a part of us to be overcome, but the miracles teach us that with the Lord's help they can be overcome. And they teach us the orderly way in which to set about it. First we must believe that the Lord is God and able to heal our spiritual ills. Then we must go to Him and ask His help. And finally

we must cooperate by obeying His commands.

Many people, looking upon physical health as essential to happiness, think that physical miracles should be wrought today. It is true that forgetfulness of self and trust in the Lord will do much to keep us in good health both physically and mentally. But Swedenborg tells us that the Lord does not perform miracles today as He did when He was in the world, not because of lack of faith on our part but because miracles today would force men to believe in Him when they did not want to follow Him, and this would do more harm than good. We are in an age of reason, and the Lord wants us to choose freely to believe in Him and do His will. In the Lord's time miracles could be performed because the people were so worldly and materialistic that even miracles could not make them believe. Read Matthew 9:34. The Lord's miracles strengthened the faith of those who already believed in Him, but did not convince others.

The Lord performed miracles principally so that they could be recorded as part of the letter of the Word and through their correspondence teach people in all times what the Lord is able to do for their souls. Each miracle is a study in itself, and their importance is in their spiritual meaning.

Basic Correspondences

leprosy = the profanation of truth

fever = the burning of inner wrong desires

possession = slavery to evil thoughts and desires

Senior

The nature of true faith, the two reasons for the miracles, and the reason why miracles are not desirable today may all be discussed with this class. The young people should be led to see that belief in the miracles is rational and is essential to our understanding of the Bible and of the Lord's operation in the world.

Throughout the three years of His public ministry the Lord performed miracles. Each one is a study in itself, and we are not able in Sunday school to take up even all the afflictions healed in our

chapter for today. But we need to know that all the miracles were performed by means of correspondence, thus according to divine order and not contrary to it. Any claim that the miracles are "contrary to nature" overlooks the origin of natural law. The laws of nature are the Lord's laws for nature and all nature is perpetually under His control. The study of medicine is the attempt to learn the natural causes of disease and to overcome it by the use of natural means. It is a right and useful study. Yet we know that many lose the fight against disease "in spite of all the doctor could do," and we know that many recover whom the doctors have "given up." The Lord is always the source of health, both physical and mental, whether He works through doctors and medicine or independently of them. When He was in the world, divine power was immediately present and effective with those who came to Him in faith.

Faith in the Lord's divine power was a prerequisite for healing in all His miracles. This faith was and is essential to the establishment of that inner conjunction with the Lord which enables Him to act directly into the human soul. It is the opening of the door to the Lord of which He speaks in Revelation 3:20. Genuine faith also means that the person will cooperate with the Lord by obeying His commands. If we have this faith, the Lord can do many things for us, even physically, which He cannot otherwise do. We know that many physical and mental ills are the direct result of evil passions and of fear and worry, things which are rejected from the heart and mind of one who trusts in the Lord and obeys Him.

The miracles of the Lord were not performed to convince the unbelieving. Read Matthew 9:34 and 13:54-58. Indeed, the miracles would not have been performed except among people of such a character that they could see such things and if they wished attribute them to other than divine power. For the Lord forces no one to believe in Him. The miracles strengthened the faith only of those who already believed.

But the deeper reason for the miracles was that they might be recorded in the Word and by their correspondence teach us what

the Lord will do for our souls. Divine providence looks always to our spiritual rather than to our physical health. To seek to believe in the Lord in order that we may be physically well is an inversion of true order. Physical health is a blessing only to those who will be better off spiritually with than without it. We know that with many men and women, physical disability of one kind or another has been a spur to efforts which have resulted in greatness, and we know that many healthy persons are neither good nor useful members of society.

Each miracle in our chapter points out to us some spiritual failing which by the Lord's power we can recognize and overcome. Leprosy is a picture of hypocrisy, of what Swedenborg calls "profanation of truth." The skin of the leper was very white, but there was disease within, which gradually destroyed the tissues and eventually rendered the person's appearance horrible. So a hypocrite may at first impress people as an exemplary citizen, but when they come to see what he is within, they are deeply repelled by him. We should try to think whether or not we are doing good deeds only "to be seen of men," and should set ourselves with the Lord's help to make our goodness genuine and sincere instead of sham.

Palsy is the inability to control the muscles, to walk and act firmly. It pictures the inability to carry out steadily in our acts the good intentions of our hearts. In this chapter the palsied man was the servant of a Roman centurion, a Gentile. The Lord often contrasts the hypocrisy of those who had the law with the humility of the Gentiles and their genuine desire to learn how to live rightly. It was the centurion's complete reliance on the Lord's power which enabled the Lord to heal the servant without even entering his home.

Fever is a picture of being "burned up," as we often call it, by resentment or some other wrong feeling. The hand is the symbol of power in action. The Lord can take us by the hand and give us strength to put away such feelings, if our desire in life is to minister to others.

The stilling of the storm teaches us that the Lord's spirit in our hearts can quiet all the adverse winds and waves which threaten to overwhelm us. The Lord is never really asleep—it is we who are asleep to His presence.

The casting out of devils is the symbol of the Lord's power to cleanse our hearts of evil passions and our minds of false thoughts if only we will look to Him for guidance and strength. Swine are the symbol of bodily appetites, and we should be able to see that our evil passions actually make us animals instead of men, and destroy us. Notice that the inhabitants of the city cared more for their swine than they did for the healing of their sick brothers.

As New Churchmen we should be able to answer the common question, "Why, if we have faith, should we not expect miracles today?" One of the clearest answers in the writings of the church is found in the passage quoted at the end of this lesson.

Adult

The teacher should read, if possible, *Divine Providence*, nn. 129-133, but in any case the quotation from n. 133 which is printed at the end of the lesson. Adult discussion should center on the nature and purpose of the Biblical miracles and why miracles are not orderly today. This is information found only in the writings of the New Church and much needed today. If there is time at the end of the class period for discussion of particular miracles in the chapter, the teacher will find their basic correspondence developed in the Senior notes.

Many people do not believe in the Biblical miracles, even some who profess to follow Jesus Christ. This is not because the text of Scripture—the only source of our knowledge of the Lord—leaves any room for doubt, but because they are unwilling to believe in what they call the "supernatural," and so reject all evidence of it. This rejection should be recognized for what it is: a purely arbitrary act of will, not based on knowledge or reason. There is ample evidence of the existence of the supernatural in everyone's experience if he is willing to recognize it.

If we believe in God, we must believe that He is the creator of

the universe and everything in it, and that He has power to act in it and to control it. To give the name of God to the forces of nature is not to believe in God. There are many things, even in the natural universe, which we do not understand although we know they exist and even make use of them in our everyday life—electricity, for example. These forces have been in the world from the beginning and have affected men's lives, but it is only recently that men have known enough to make any intelligent use of them. We do not know enough even about the laws of nature to have any rational ground for denying the possibility of the miracles. In the growth of a seed into a tree, in the preservation of life through the dormant winter states, in the knitting of a bone, in countless daily happenings we see the Lord doing things which we do not understand and could not do ourselves. The Lord made the world, the laws of nature are His laws for nature, and He alone fully understands them. The laws of nature were not broken in the performance of the miracles. Divine power, immediately present in the world, simply operated in nature in ways which we are not prepared to understand. And it was the same divine power which operated through the disciples when, at His command, they also performed miracles. All healing today, by whatever instrumental means, is wrought by the Lord.

Yet there is a difference between the miracles of Scripture and those which the Lord is constantly working today. Scripture miracles were performed more rapidly—some of them instantaneously. Why should not such things happen now? It is because the Lord had a special purpose in performing His miracles. He had but a limited time to be present to the sight of men on earth. He had to crowd into that time acts which should teach for all time His power over every type of affliction. Because the people he ministered to were a wholly external people, they could not be impressed except upon the most external plane. It is not so with men today. The Lord's resurrection set men free from bondage to materialistic and sensual thinking. It is possible for us today to understand spiritual things, the realities behind nature, and the Lord wants us to

come to Him because of these realities and not merely for bodily health, comfort, and success.

Moreover, miracles never really convince anyone. We may think that if we could see a miracle performed we should believe, but this is not true. Many times people who did not wish to believe in the existence of the supernatural have had spiritual experiences so powerful that at the time they knew them to be real; yet as soon as the experience was over, they began to explain it away as hallucination or dream. The scribes and Pharisees were not convinced by the Lord's miracles, although they witnessed many of them. Read Matthew 9:34.

The Lord did not perform His miracles for the sake of convincing those unwilling to believe. He never seeks to force belief in Him. He performed miracles only for those who already believed. The very devils whom He cast out believed in His power before they were cast out. He makes this point very clear, for in almost every account of a miracle in the Word there is some preliminary assurance of the faith of the person involved.

But the Lord had another purpose in performing His miracles. They were necessary for the sake of the letter of the Word, that they might stand forever in the Scripture as the ultimates in which spiritual truths might be contained. In general they teach us that all life and health and power come from the Lord and that faith in Him and obedience to His commandments are required of us. And each miracle also teaches its particular spiritual lesson.

Three general types of miracle are included in our chapter. The stilling of the storm manifests the Lord's power over inanimate nature and should teach us the limitations of natural science. We think we know a great deal about the cause of storms. A pertinent question is, "Why is the weatherman not always right?" He is kept informed of the storms that are coming his way and of atmospheric conditions all over the country. Why should he not be able to predict accurately for his own section? The answer is, because unexpected things "happen." There are factors in the case of which he is ignorant. Something happened to shift the course of

the wind, to dissipate a storm or to bring one about. This happening was not accidental; it was according to law, only the law was too deep or too high for human knowledge. The Lord's will is active in nature today as really as when He stood in the boat on the Sea of Galilee. His wisdom directs nature according to our spiritual needs. It is literally true today that "even the winds and the sea obey him." And this is only the outermost lesson involved in this miracle.

The healing of physical disease manifests the Lord's control over the conditions of our bodies. When a person is ill and recovers, he attributes his recovery to the medicine he took or to the doctor who treated him or to a faith healer or to the prayers of his friends. Yet none of these agents always succeeds, and many recover without recourse to any of them. There are factors in physical health which we cannot understand or predict. It is still the Lord's will which operates and the Lord's wisdom which directs our recovery or our continued trial or our passing into the spiritual world. And again, this is but the outmost lesson.

And the Lord has power today (just as He did when He cast out devils long ago) over mental disorders. There is perhaps no other field in which men feel so helpless, in which prediction is so uncertain. And all efforts to prevent and to cure insanity point to the fact that one of its underlying causes is dwelling upon self. Give the person something to "occupy his mind," "to take his mind off himself," is often the first advice. There is only one course which can really take one's mind off himself, and that is turning to the Lord, choosing the spiritual company of angels in place of that of the devils associated with our natural heredity, and applying our efforts and talents to the service of the Lord and the neighbor. It is the Lord alone who can keep the mind sane.

Each miracle in our chapter has its individual lesson and is a study in itself. Each physical or mental ailment has its spiritual correspondent, and every detail in the Lord's healing of it is significant. Our chapter, like every chapter in the Word, is a challenge to continued study.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Divine Providence, n. 133: "The effect of miracles on the good and on the evil is different. The good do not desire miracles, but they believe in the miracles recorded in the Word. . . . It is not so with the evil. They may be driven and compelled to a belief in miracles, and even to worship and piety, but only for a short time; for their evils are shut in; and the lusts of their evils and the enjoyments therefrom continually act upon their external of worship and piety; and in order to get out of their confinement and break away they reflect upon the miracle, and at length call it a trick or artifice, or a work of nature, and thus go back to their evils. And he who returns to his evils after he has worshiped profanes the goods and truths of worship; and the lot after death of those who commit profanation is the worst of all. . . . Furthermore, if it is needful to work miracles for the sake of those who do not believe from miracles in the Word, they must be wrought for all such continually and visibly. All this makes clear why miracles are not wrought at this day."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. What three kinds of work did the Lord do in His ministry? *teaching, preaching, healing*
- P. About which kind is our lesson for today? *healing*
- P. What is a miracle? *wonderful thing done by the Lord*
- J. Can you tell what some of the troubles the Lord healed were? *leprosy, palsy, fever, possession*
- P. What did He do for Peter's wife's mother? *cured fever*
- J. How did He heal the centurion's servant? *by His words*
- P. Where did He go with some of His disciples? *into a boat*
- P. What happened while they were on the sea? *storm*
- P. What did the Lord say when they woke Him? *Why are you afraid?*
- P. What did the Lord do? *stilled the storm*
- I. What do different kinds of diseases represent? *weaknesses and deformities of the soul*
- I. What was the condition which had to be fulfilled if the Lord was to heal a person? *had to have faith in the Lord*
- S. Why did the Lord perform miracles when He was on earth? *to strengthen faith; to record in Word*
- S. Why should we not ask for miracles today? *tend to force belief*

PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Matthew 13

The essential general points in this lesson are the reason why the Lord spoke in parables, the fact that heaven must be within us if we are to go to heaven when we die, and the fact that heaven is developed gradually within us as we receive and cultivate seeds of truth from the Word.

Doctrinal Points

The parables of the kingdom treat of the development of heavenly character.

Everyone receives enough truth for salvation.

Understanding of the Lord's truth comes through obeying it.

Notes for Parents

In our chapter for today we are told that the Lord always spoke in parables (verse 34), and the Lord Himself gives us the reason in verses 11 to 15. We have tried to give the children this reason in a form which they can understand. In the Lord's sight we are all children, very ignorant and often very willful and intentionally deaf to His clear teachings. So He tries to reach our minds with stories so simple and concrete that they will stay with us as stories until we wake up to our need of their lessons.

There are seven parables in our chapter—all about the kingdom of heaven—and if we read them thoughtfully, we shall see that they form a series showing us how this kingdom is developed. We are told in Luke 17:21 that the kingdom of heaven is within us. This means that if we are to live in heaven when we die, we must develop heavenly life within us while we are in this world.

The beginning of the heavenly kingdom within us is the sowing of the seed. We must learn the truths of the Word. Every seed of

truth that is sown in our minds is like the mustard seed which has within it the capacity of growing into a great sheltering tree, but we know well that all the seeds we take into our minds do not take root and grow. Sometimes our minds are hard, sometimes they are shallow, sometimes they are so full of selfish thoughts that the truth is choked out. And then there are the tares, false ideas we have which look like the truth to us and which take a long time to show their real character. And we need to be tried and purified by the experience of temptation, as yeast in our bread dough ferments and lightens the heavy mass.

All four of these parables the Lord spoke to the multitude, for they picture the first steps which everyone must take before he can become a true follower of the Lord. But afterward He took His disciples aside and gave them further parables. If we become disciples, we can understand more than the multitude. The worldly man cannot even think of heavenly knowledge as a treasure, or of the understanding and worship of the Lord as a pearl of great price worth the sacrifice of all his natural, selfish ambitions. And as the last parable in the chapter points out, it is this very choice of the Lord or self, made over and over again, day by day, which will determine our eternal happiness or unhappiness. The choice is not something we can safely put off. We should know that the phrase "end of the world" which we find in this chapter [KJV] is not a correct translation of the original Greek. The phrase should read "consummation of the age." Our judgment is not put off to some future destruction of this material world, but comes when our individual life here is finished.

The last few verses of our chapter are more closely knit to the series of parables than we might at first think. The people of Nazareth did not benefit by the Lord's presence among them because they persisted in thinking of Him as just a man like themselves. Many think of Him so today, refusing to consider all the testimony of the Scriptures and of history to the fact that He was no finite man, but Emmanuel—"God with us." The pearl of great price is really the acknowledgment that Christ is God Himself. This makes

His every word the truth itself and obedience to His commands
the one sure way to heaven.

Primary

The meaning of the sower, the seed, and the different kinds of ground can be understood at this age, and this is a good opportunity to tell the children that the whole Word is a parable. Touch on the other parables in the chapter as showing us how the good seed develops in our minds and some of the things that hinder its development.

Our story today is one of the parables which the Lord told the people. Do you remember what a parable is? It is a story with another meaning inside of it. Our chapter tells us that the Lord always spoke to the people in parables.

You know that when your mother tells you that you ought to do something or that something you are doing is wrong, sometimes you try hard not to listen because you don't want to hear and have to change your ways. But when she tells you or reads you a story, you like to listen because it is interesting to hear about other people and you don't think the story has anything to do with you and your behavior. Afterwards, however, you may get to thinking about the story and find that the little girl or boy in it is really very much like yourself and that what happened in the story might easily happen to you. And then you may decide all by yourself that you had better make some changes in your behavior.

Grown people are no different from you in this, and the Lord knew it. That is why He always spoke in parables. When you are older, you will find that the whole Word is a parable.

In our chapter for today there are some very well-known parables.

The first is called the parable of the sower.

Can you tell the story?

The Lord told His disciples what the story meant.

The Sower is the Lord.

The seed is truth from the Word.

What are the different kinds of ground?

Then the Lord told them some parables about the kingdom of heaven.

You know that heaven is where good people go when they die.
But the Lord said, "The kingdom of God is within you."
This means that if we are to go to heaven, we have to become heavenly people.
The Lord came into the world to show us just how to become heavenly people.
Do we become heavenly all at once?
No. We learn little by little what is right, and if we try to do it—to live according to the truth we learn from the Word—gradually a heavenly character grows in us.
All these parables about the kingdom of heaven help us to understand this.

Junior

With this class the parables should be treated as a series. Take up in some detail the parable of the sower and the parable of the tares and the wheat, and then do as much with the others as you have time for.

What is a parable?

How many parables are there in our chapter for today?

What is the first one called?

Have you heard it before?

Is it easy to remember?

That was one reason why the Lord spoke in parables. People liked to hear these little stories, and could remember them. Then, when they were ready to understand the deeper meaning of them, it was easy to give it. We see how the closer disciples of the Lord were looking for the deeper meaning and ready to hear it. But the "multitude" were not ready, and so all the Lord gave them was the story.

What are all the parables in this chapter about?

We are likely to think of heaven just as a place where good people go when they die, but in the Gospel of Luke (17:21) the Lord tells us that it is within us. All these parables tell us something of how it is developed in us. First the seed must be sown. The sower in our first parable is the Lord, and the seed is "the word of the kingdom," truth from the Word of God. Everyone, in the course of his life, hears truths from the Word either directly or indirectly. What happens to this seed in his life depends first on his willingness to hear divine truth and secondly on whether or not he accepts and obeys it. And from the parable of the mustard seed

we learn that every little seed of truth has within it the possibility of growing in our lives into a great tree or principle. It is truth from the Word received into our minds and planted in our daily life from which the kingdom of heaven develops within us. But there are many things which hinder.

Do we always immediately know that a thing is right or wrong?

Tares were a kind of false wheat. As they were growing, they looked like wheat, but their grain was poisonous. Sometimes we do things without knowing they are wrong. And often we accept things as true which are not true. Everything that is good and true comes to us from the Lord. Everything that is evil and false comes to us from the hells. It is only gradually that we learn to see the difference, just as tares in the field could not be recognized easily until after they were grown. But in the end, we must destroy the tares. You remember that the Lord said, "By their fruits ye shall know them." Whenever we come to see that some way of life that we have thought was good actually leads to trouble and unhappiness, we may know that it is a "tare" and that we must get rid of it.

Study the other parables in this chapter and see how much you can understand of their inner meaning. They all lead up to the parable of the pearl of great price. This pearl is true knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ as our one God, which we have made our own by living according to His teachings. To sell all that we have is to give up our own ideas and selfish desires in order to possess the heavenly character which is based on this knowledge. The last parable in the chapter teaches us very plainly that when we go into the other world at death, we shall be in heaven if we are found to be good and in hell if we are found to be evil. We cannot change our lives after we die.

Intermediate

The importance of our daily choices, especially our choices as to thought and feeling, should be emphasized, and the need of receiving and cultivating seeds of truth from the Word and of rooting out thorns. Point out that in the Word

the sequence of events or of stories is never accidental.

Verse 34 of our chapter tells us that the Lord always taught in parables. A parable is a simple story easily understood and remembered. Like stored seed it can lie in the mind for a long time, and then when the right conditions are present, it can suddenly take root and develop. This is what the Word does in our minds. The longer we live and the deeper our experience, the more of it we understand and the more we can be helped by it.

The seven parables in our chapter form a series treating of the development of a heavenly character, for, as Luke 17:21 tells us, the kingdom of God is within us. We begin with the sowing of the seed, which is "the word of the kingdom." The Lord is the sower, and He sees to it that everyone born into the world receives some truth from the Word either directly or indirectly. Whether the seed bears fruit or not depends on the degree to which we open our minds to it, cherish it, and give it room to grow. The disciples, who sought enlightenment from the Lord, could be given a deeper understanding of the parable. The multitude merely heard the story. Each one of us decides whether he will be a disciple or not.

The parable of the tares shows us why we cannot overcome all our evils at once. It takes time and experience for us to form clear judgments as to what is good and what is bad even in our own character.

The parable of the mustard seed teaches us the importance of studying the Word in all its detail, for there is no truth so small that it may not sometime become of great importance to us.

The parable of the leaven shows us the need of considering our problems long enough and deeply enough to be sure that selfishness is ruled out of our judgment of what we ought to do.

The next two parables point out the fact that a heavenly character is worth any price we have to pay for it. The pearl is a picture of a true understanding of the Lord achieved by a life according to His teachings.

Finally the parable of the net treats of the judgment in the other life, when our motives will be exposed and the good and bad

finally separated. In this connection read Revelation 21:27.

From this whole series we learn that heaven is not something meted out arbitrarily by the Lord after we die, but a slow growth in our hearts and minds throughout this life. It must be founded on truth from the Word, which must be received voluntarily and can grow only as falsity and evil are put away. And it must become the thing we desire above all others. The Lord does not force us to learn of Him, to obey Him, or to love Him. We choose freely whether we will serve Him or not.

Basic Correspondences

seed = truths from the Word

tares = falsities

pearls = a true understanding of the Lord
achieved by obedience to Him

Senior

Discussion in this class should center on the importance of our inner life of thought and feeling. The reason why the Word is written in parable is also an essential point of instruction at this age, as this knowledge will keep young people, when they go to college, from taking into their minds without question much well-meant but mistaken instruction in regard to the Bible.

Perhaps no chapter in the Scriptures is so full of avowed parables as this one. Yet we know that the whole of Scripture is a parable. Verse 34 tells us, "without a parable spake he not unto them." The reason for this is that the parable, a simple story of commonplace events, is easily heard and understood and stays in the mind. Those who are unwilling to learn of spiritual things see only the story, but those who are looking for a way of life can be shown its inner meaning.

We can see this in our own experience in reading the Bible. From our childhood up the literal story becomes familiar to us and gradually, as our experience grows and our spiritual needs increase, its meaning appears. Sometimes a passage of the Scriptures which we have heard again and again without much thought

"comes alive" suddenly in relation to some present problem or need.

Several things appear clearly from the wonderful series of parables in our chapter for today. First, heavenly life grows only from truths of the Word planted in the life. Second, this growth is not sudden or spectacular but little by little and almost imperceptible. Third, we may not be able at first to distinguish clearly between good and evil, truth and falsity, but in time we can recognize them by their fruits, separate them, and cast out the harmful. Finally, a heavenly character is the most precious of all possessions and worth any sacrifice, and it is the only thing which can insure our eternal happiness.

The last part of the chapter is particularly applicable to the state of the Christian world today. When the Lord went "into his own country," that is, into Nazareth, He could do no great works because the people there thought of Him as merely human. The trend in some parts of the Protestant world today seems to be away from a belief in the deity of Christ. By this unbelief people cut themselves off from the source of spiritual power. Men look to themselves for guidance instead of to the Lord. Belief in the Lord and belief in the Word are the foundations of the Christian Church and the foundations of a heavenly character in the individual. They are the "good ground" in which alone the seed of truth can take root and flourish. The Lord alone through His Word gives power to do good.

Adult

Each parable in the chapter might furnish material for the whole discussion period, but it will be better to treat them all briefly, tying them together with the realization that they form a series on the development of heaven within us, from the first sowing of the seed to the final ingathering.

A parable is a story which has a lesson within it. When we talk to little children, we instinctively put things we wish to teach them in story form—we do not expect them to understand abstract

statements. In the eyes of the Lord we are all children. The most logical and well-trained finite mind can grasp only a little of the Lord's truth. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts . . . saith the Lord." Yet the Lord's thoughts are expressed in language which we can grasp, for in the Word they are ultimated in the things of nature and of our daily life. He speaks to us constantly, as we speak to little children, in concrete forms which we can grasp because they are part of our experience. The Lord never leaves anyone without the means of salvation. The simple stories which He told to the multitude would remain in their minds. If the time ever came when they really wished to learn more of the Lord, the stories could be recalled from their memories and they could be given to see their meaning. So it is with each one of us. We learn stories of the Word in childhood when they are nothing but stories to us. But because in their external form they are easily understandable, they remain in our memories and later, when we develop a desire for spiritual understanding, the Lord can enlighten us through them.

The familiar parable of the sower is simple and striking in its outer form. The knowledge that in the Holy Land in the Lord's day seed was sown broadcast enables us to understand the details of the literal story. The wayside was not like our waysides, full of wild vegetation: it was the hard, trodden paths across the fields. The rocky ground was the ground where rock came almost to the surface, with only a thin covering of earth. The thorny places were corners which had been allowed to run wild. As the Lord sat in the boat looking at the multitude gathered before Him on the shore, He saw their hearts and minds with their varying conditions of receptivity, and He was speaking of Himself when He said, "Behold, a sower went forth to sow." The seed, as He later told His disciples, is "the word of the kingdom," the divine truth which He wished to plant in their minds. Every word which proceeded out of His mouth was like a seed, concealing within it a germ of living truth which, if rightly received and cared for, would grow into a plant bearing fruit "unto life eternal." He had told the tempter, "Man

shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Later He would call Himself the "living bread which came down from heaven." As He spoke to the multitude, He perceived the state of each one in it, saw the seed He was sowing broadcast falling into the minds of those before Him, and knew what would happen to it with each one. In the different kinds of ground in His parable, He was painting a picture of what He saw.

In our chapter there are seven parables, all about the kingdom of heaven. Why so many? Swedenborg tells us that the Lord's purpose in creation was "a heaven from the human race." It is essential, then, that men should know what heaven is and how to attain it. So from the beginning the Lord has told us about the kingdom of heaven in every way which could reach our understanding and appeal to our wills. It is not His fault if we are blind and deaf to His teachings. The seven parables present seven pictures which portray the beginning and the growth of the kingdom of heaven, which the Lord elsewhere tells us "is within you."

We have seen that the parable of the sower teaches how the seed is sown and received. The next parable, that of the wheat and the tares, points out that good seed is not the only seed sown in our minds, that evil spirits seek to sow seeds of falsity while we "sleep"—in states when we are not awake to spiritual realities—and that we cannot always distinguish between good and evil in their beginnings. When we cannot, both truth and falsity must grow in us and bear fruit before we can be sure of their quality. "By their fruits ye shall know them."

The parable of the mustard seed is one of encouragement. We need encouragement when we are trying to live a heavenly life, for as we go on, we see so many "tares" in ourselves, and so little "wheat"! But the Lord tells us that every little beginning we make has the power to grow and expand into a veritable tree. This parable is especially fulfilled when we come into the other world where all our beginnings of heavenly life are forever increased.

The fourth parable, that of the leaven, takes us another step in

spiritual development. Leaven, which was a piece of old sour dough, is a symbol of falsity. The Lord told His disciples to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." But leaven is made to serve a use. It sets up fermentation in bread dough which causes the bread to become light and digestible as the gases are expelled. So falsity is used by the Lord to set up a fermentation in our minds so that we may recognize and expel our evils and "digest" the truth. Spiritual combats or temptations are fermentations in the spiritual sense (AC 7906). To the church in Pergamos, whose danger was that they had there the doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitans, the Lord said, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna." (Revelation 2:12)

These first four parables the Lord spoke to the multitude. The last three He spoke to the disciples alone. They picture states of heavenly living which only those who have "continued" with the Lord in temptations are able to experience. The fifth pictures the kingdom of heaven as a treasure hid in a field. Those who have endured long enough to realize something of the genuine happiness of spiritual living become willing to give up their own ways for the sake of gaining the Lord's way of life—the field—in which that treasure is hidden.

The sixth parable sums up this treasure in one "pearl of great price," for which the merchant who discovered it was willing to sell everything else. Swedenborg tells us that pearls represent "knowledges of good and truth" (AE 1044) and that the one "pearl of great price" is "the acknowledgment and knowledge of the Lord" (AR 916). In the latter number he also tells us, "the knowledge of the Lord is the universal of all things of doctrine and thence of all things of the church." The realization of this fact does not come early in our Christian experience. It is rather the culmination of a long life of effort to learn the Lord's truth and to live the spiritual life. But when we do come to this realization, everything else will seem insignificant in comparison with it.

The final parable pictures the close of life when the net is full—when all the experiences, good and bad, of a lifetime are gathered

up and examined in the light of that final holy state of love to the Lord, and the bad are rejected and the good carried forward to be developed to eternity in the new life of heaven. We should note that "end of the world" [KJV] is a mistranslation. The Greek words mean "consummation of the age." Nowhere does the Word speak of the destruction of the material universe.

The final incident of the chapter emphasizes the whole teaching that the prime essential for receiving heavenly blessings is acknowledgment that the Lord Jesus Christ was not a finite man but what He claimed to be, "Emmanuel, God with us."

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Revealed, n. 916: "*And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: each one of the gates was of one pearl,* signifies that the acknowledgment and knowledge of the Lord, conjoins into one all the knowledges of truth and good, which are from the Word, and introduce into the church. . . . By 'twelve pearls' is also signified the knowledges of truth and good in a summary, hence it was that 'the gates' were 'pearls'; the reason why 'each of the gates was of one pearl' is, because all the knowledges of good and truth, which are signified by 'gates' and by 'pearls' have relation to one knowledge, which is their containant, which one knowledge is the knowledge of the Lord. It is called one knowledge, although there are many which constitute that knowledge; for the knowledge of the Lord is the universal of all things of doctrine and thence of all things of the church. . . . That the acknowledgment and knowledge of Him is the pearl itself, is meant by these words of the Lord in Matthew . . . xiii, 45, 46."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. What is a parable? *a story with an inner meaning*
- P. Why did the Lord always speak in parables? *His words always had a deeper meaning*
- J. What are all the parables in our chapter about? *the kingdom of heaven*
- P. What is the first parable in the chapter called? *the sower*
- P. Why could the Lord explain it to His disciples? *they were eager to learn*
- J. Who is the sower? *the Lord*
- J. What is the seed? *truth from the Word*
- P. What are the different kinds of ground? *different kinds of minds*

- J. Where must the kingdom of heaven be if we are to live in it when we die?
within us
- J. How many parables of the kingdom of heaven are there in this chapter?
seven
- J. How many of them can you name?
- I. What does the parable of the tares teach us? *why we cannot overcome all our evils at once*
- I. What is the general lesson of the whole series of parables? *development of heavenly character*
- S. What is the pearl of great price? *knowledge and acknowledgment of the Lord*

THE TRANSFIGURATION

Matthew 17:1-13

In all classes begin by speaking of the twelve special disciples of the Lord and especially of the first four chosen: Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Even the youngest can learn these four familiar names. Be sure also that they know which three of these were closest to the Lord. Explain the meaning of the word *transfigure* and then go on to the story. A good plan is to read it verse by verse from the Word, explaining as you go.

Doctrinal Points

Our life in this world is important only as it affects our souls.

The Lord keeps us from truths we are not ready to receive and use rightly.

To acknowledge a truth but then refuse to live according to it is profanation.

If we study the Lord's life and follow His example, we, too, can see Him in His true glory and beauty.

Notes for Parents

The word *transfiguration* means literally a "change of face." We can easily see why this name is given to the vision in our chapter.

The three disciples chosen to see this vision were the Lord's three closest followers. He could give them instruction and experiences for which the others were not prepared. But our lesson shows us how far even they were from understanding what He gave them. If you have read chapter 16 with the children, you know that Peter, at least, had expressed his belief that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God." It was this belief which was the rock on which the Lord said His church was to be founded. And now Peter sees the Lord in the light of His divine glory, and yet, because Moses and Elijah were seen talking with Him, Peter's

first impulse is to worship all three—a tabernacle is the symbol of worship.

Peter's impulse was corrected immediately by the voice from heaven and the appearance of the Lord alone. Yet there was still a question in the minds of the three disciples. The vision of Elias—*Elias* is the Greek form of *Elijah*—made them think of the prophecy in Malachi 4:5. The Lord answered this question, too. John the Baptist was not, of course, a reincarnation of Elijah (read John 1:21), but he was nevertheless the fulfillment of the prophecy. Jesus had already told the disciples this (Matthew 11:7-15), but they had forgotten it.

To the disciples Moses stood for the Law and Elijah for the Prophets. It is for this reason that they were seen by the disciples talking with the Lord. After His resurrection the Lord was to show His disciples the things which were written of Him “in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms” (Luke 24:44), and we may well imagine that then the three disciples remembered the vision they had had on the high mountain and understood it better. But we must realize that there is a great deal in the Gospels that the disciples could never understand, for they were men like ourselves, limited by their education and background, and the Gospels were given by the Lord Himself by inspiration in words in which men and women for all time would find ever deeper meaning.

Today we know, for example, that the high mountain was a symbol of a very high level of thinking, that the Lord's face shone as the sun because He was inmost God Himself, the “sun of our souls,” that His raiment “white as the light” pictured the pure truth in which His every word and act was clothed, that Moses and Elijah appeared talking with Him because it is He who really speaks to us in all the Law and the Prophets, that the bright cloud which overshadowed the disciples is this same letter of the Word when something of its divine meaning shines through to us, and that the voice from heaven is the Lord's voice speaking to us in the Word, telling us to look to Him alone for the way of life.

Primary

This will not be a hard lesson to teach, although its meaning is beyond the reach of the little children. They will like the details of the story, and can be told that this is the way they may sometime see the Lord in heaven if they are good. Do something with the reason why only the Lord's closest disciples could see Him transfigured. Remind the children that the same voice from heaven saying almost the same words was heard at the time of the Lord's baptism. Tell them in a simple way why Moses and Elijah were seen with the Lord.

The Lord chose twelve men to be His special followers. He chose them because He saw that they wanted to learn what was really right so that they could be good, and He saw in each one of them some special quality which would be needed in His church. For these twelve men were to be sent out into the world, after the Lord went back to His place in the heavens, to start the Christian Church. In the Bible one who learned of the Lord is called a "disciple."

See if you can learn the names of the first four disciples the Lord chose. They were two pair of brothers: Peter and Andrew, James and John. Three of these four came to be closer to the Lord than all the others. They were with Him constantly, and He showed them and taught them things for which the others were not ready.

Who were they?

Once these three were allowed to see a wonderful vision.

Where did the Lord take them to see it?

On the mountain they saw Him transfigured.

Transfigured means "changed in appearance."

What did His face look like?

What was different about His garments?

Whom did they see talking with Him?

Do you remember who Moses was?

He was the one to whom the commandments were given at Mount Sinai, and the first five books of the Bible, which are called "the Law," were given through him.

Elias is the Greek word for *Elijah*. We have had lessons about both Moses and Elijah, and perhaps you remember that Moses was the man through whom the Lord gave the "Law" at Mount Sinai and that Elijah was a great prophet. The Jews all thought that Moses and Elijah were very great men. When Peter saw them with

the Lord in the vision, He thought at first that all three must be equal.

What happened then?

What did the voice say?

Do you remember another time when the same thing was said?

The disciples fell on their faces in fear.

But when the Lord told them not to be afraid, they looked up again.

Were Moses and Elias still there?

What did the Lord tell them about the vision?

We had another lesson not long ago in which the voice from heaven was heard saying of Jesus, "This is my beloved Son." Do you remember what that other time was? While the Lord was in the world, He was often called the Son of God. When you are older, you will understand why.

Junior

The correspondence of going up into a high mountain apart is important for this class. They need to begin to see that their everyday thoughts and feelings are apt to be very worldly and that they must look at them and judge them. Show them that if we wish to see the Lord as He really is, we must study the Word and make ourselves obey the Lord's commandments. Have the class look up the Scripture references given in their notes, and tie in the lesson with the story of John the Baptist and the Lord's baptism.

Where were the commandments given?

Where were the Blessings given?

Do you remember what going up into a mountain means?

Today we have another famous story about a mountain.

What three disciples did the Lord take up into the mountain with Him?

There they saw the Lord transfigured, which means "changed in appearance."

How was the Lord's appearance changed?

Whom did they see with Him?

Elias is the Greek form of the name *Elijah*. For the ancient Hebrews Moses represented the Law and Elijah the Prophets. So this was a vision to teach the disciples that the Lord was really the Messiah promised in the Law and the Prophets. They saw this vision not with their physical but with their spiritual eyes. They were

seeing the Lord as He really is, as the angels see Him in heaven.

What did Peter want to do?

Peter and James and John had followed the Lord in all His journeys and had seen Him do many wonderful things. They had become convinced that He really was the Messiah. Peter had already declared this belief. Read verses 13 to 18 of chapter 16. We know that the "rock" mentioned in verse 18 did not mean Peter himself but the great truth he had just declared, that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, God with us. It is this truth upon which entrance to heaven depends and which we must accept if we are to see the Lord transfigured. We see the Lord with our minds. If we study His life and follow His example, we can be like the three chosen disciples and see Him in His true glory and beauty.

But Peter was confused by seeing Moses and Elijah with the Lord in the vision. You remember that the tabernacle was built for worship of the Lord. So Peter's suggestion meant that just then he thought the vision was telling them that Moses and Elijah and the Lord should all be worshiped.

What happened while he was speaking to the Lord?

What did the voice out of the bright cloud say?

Afterward they saw the Lord only, and they realized that He alone was to be worshiped.

The Lord told them not to tell others of the vision, because the minds of most people were not prepared to believe that He was the Messiah.

What did the Lord tell the disciples about John the Baptist?

Look up Malachi 4:5-6. Elijah and John the Baptist were both sent to preach repentance and so to prepare people to receive the Lord. The Lord had told the disciples before that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Malachi (Matthew 11:14), but they had forgotten it.

Intermediate

More can be done in this class with Peter's declaration in chapter 16, as well

as with all the details of the correspondence. The reason why the three disciples were not to tell others of the vision should be explained. See also on this point John 14:22-23.

For three years the Lord went from place to place through the Holy Land, crossing occasionally into the country on the other side of the Jordan, preaching, teaching, and healing. He made His home at Capernaum and much of His ministry was carried on in Galilee. He went to Jerusalem for the feasts, passing to and fro through Samaria. In all these journeyings the twelve disciples followed Him. They saw Him turn water into wine, still the storm, multiply the loaves and fishes, open the eyes of the blind, cleanse the leper, raise the dead, cast out devils. They listened to His instruction. Gradually He ascended in their thoughts, and they became convinced that He was really the Messiah.

So when He asked the question (Matthew 16:15) "Whom say ye that I am?" Peter could declare, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." This truth is the "rock" on which the Christian Church is founded, acceptance of which opens heaven. Read chapter 16, verses 18 and 19. That Peter himself was not the rock and the gatekeeper we should realize from the fact that a few verses later the Lord calls him Satan, when his natural, worldly ideas came to the fore. The Lord taught His disciples very clearly that our life in this world is important only as it affects our souls, but it was hard for them, as it is hard for us, to keep this truth in mind in the face of danger and temptation.

It is important to note that the story of the transfiguration follows this declaration of Peter's. It is the belief that Christ is God that opens the mind to see the inner beauty and glory of the Lord's life and its relation to the Law and the Prophets. These things are symbolized by the details of the transfiguration story. Going up into a mountain is the picture of raising our minds to a high level of thinking, close to the Lord. The face represents the inner character; so the Lord's face shining as the sun is the expression of divine love in His character. Garments in general are a picture of truths, which clothe our affections. The Lord's raiment white as

the light pictures divine truth which clothed His every act and word. Moses and Elias—*Elias* is the Greek form of *Elijah*—represent the Law and the Prophets.

Peter was at first confused by the vision. A tabernacle or tent represents worship of a simple, childlike kind; so Peter's suggestion shows that he thought the vision must mean that Moses and Elijah and the Lord should all be worshiped. But he was immediately taught better. The bright cloud which overshadowed them pictures the letter of the Word with its internal meaning shining through. The voice speaking from it is its testimony to the Lord's divinity. And the fact that finally the three disciples "saw no man, save Jesus only" points to the final realization that "in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," as Paul later said (Colossians 1:19).

The three disciples had been prepared for this vision by a long process of observation and instruction. Others had not been so prepared. So the three were commanded not to tell the vision until after the witness of the Lord's resurrection had made men ready to believe. This is something the Lord does for us, too. He often keeps from us truths which we are not prepared to receive and use rightly. To acknowledge a truth and refuse to try to live according to it is what Swedenborg calls "profanation," and profanation is one of the worst things we can do.

The real preparation for a true acknowledgment of the Lord begins with repentance. This is why John the Baptist had to be sent before the Lord. Both Elijah and John preached repentance. The prophecy referred to in the instruction the disciples had received from the scribes is found in Malachi 4:5, and in Matthew 11:14 we find that the Lord had already told them that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of this prophecy. John was not Elijah, but he came to do the same work.

The three disciples did not see this vision with their physical eyes. Their spiritual eyes were opened to see the Lord's inner nature. By the same process our minds can be opened to see Him truly both here and in heaven.

Basic Correspondences

garments in general = the truths that clothe our affections
Moses = the historical Word
Elijah = the prophetic Word
clouds = the literal Word

Senior

The real meaning of the transfiguration is the lesson for this class, the fact that the whole Word teaches that the Lord is the one object of our worship. The difference between seeing the Lord as a finite man like ourselves and recognizing Him as God, divine love and wisdom manifested in human form so that we can know Him, is clearly brought out in the internal sense of this story. Read with the class the quotation from Swedenborg at the end of the lesson and help them to understand it.

The Lord had been going about throughout all the Holy Land performing miracles which impressed all who saw them with the fact that some unusual power resided in Him. The scribes and Pharisees, wishing to reject His teaching, ascribed His power to Beelzebub. The multitudes who sat at His feet, prepared by John, were willing to believe that His power came from God, but they had various theories about Him, as we see from Matthew 16:14. Only a few believed with Peter that He was actually the Messiah promised in the Old Testament, Jehovah come into the world. That even all the Apostles did not believe this is evident from Philip's question in John 14:8. Yet this belief was the rock on which Christianity must be founded. Read Matthew 16, verses 16-19. It is from verses 18 and 19 that the Roman Catholic Church claims its authority, for it takes them literally and believes that the man Peter was the head of the church and was given power to admit people to heaven or to keep them out of it, and that he afterward went to Rome and handed his power down to his successors there. But read verse 23. If the Lord had meant that Peter was greater than others, He would hardly have called him Satan immediately afterward. And we also know that Peter thrice denied the Lord on the night before the crucifixion. The rock meant in verse 18 of

chapter 16 is not Peter himself but the great truth which he had just declared—that Jesus Christ is the Messiah promised throughout the Scriptures.

The question, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" is just as pertinent today as when it was first spoken. If we read the religious periodicals of the Christian world today, we find that there are still many theories about Christ and that few seem actually to believe that He was Jehovah in the flesh. Yet this belief is the only one which harmonizes the Old and the New Testaments and opens our minds to understand the Scriptures.

The vision of the transfiguration which was granted to Peter, James, and John pictures the vision which is possible to all who believe that Jesus Christ is God and who seek Him in His Word. As a necessary preparation, the Lord took them up "into an high mountain apart." To see the Lord in His Word we must raise our minds high above worldly considerations and separate our thoughts from their common associations. Like the three disciples we see at first Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets, the literal sense of the Word as it treats of the Lord. But later we may be given to see the Lord alone as we read the letter of Scripture. What Moses and the Prophets themselves were and thought ceases to be important, and we hear only the voice of the Lord speaking to us in the Word.

Peter, James, and John indeed saw the Lord in His glory, saw Him with their spiritual eyes as they would see Him in heaven; but for us the meaning of the vision is the ability which we have, if we will make the necessary preparation, to see the Lord in the spiritual sense of the Word. This preparation is more than study. It begins with humility. The order of events in the text is significant. First the vision itself is given, with Moses and Elijah present with the Lord. Then the bright cloud and the voice from heaven prepare the disciples to see the Lord alone. The bright cloud is also a symbol of the letter of the Word, but with the spiritual sense shining through, and the voice from heaven is the power of the truth proclaimed in the Word. Then the disciples are told not to

tell others of the vision until after the resurrection. We cannot expect to convince others of the validity of our New Church teachings until they have had some experience which opens their minds.

Finally there follows the question in regard to the prophecy concerning the coming of Elias (Elijah) and the Lord's answer identifying John the Baptist as the fulfillment of this prophecy. The prophecy itself is found in Malachi 4:5. If you will read Matthew 11:7-15, you will see that the Lord had given them this teaching already, but they had forgotten it—as they forgot many other things He told them. One of the lessons we should draw from this is that our understanding of the Lord and His teachings must come from our own study of the Gospels and not from what the Apostles afterward said—in the Acts and Epistles—still less from any decisions of church councils or prominent theologians. If we wish to see the Lord as He really is, we must seek Him in the inspired Word.

Adult

Good discussion topics are: the reason why Peter, James, and John were chosen to witness the transfiguration, the reason why Moses and Elijah were seen with the Lord, and the meaning of Peter's suggestion of the three tabernacles or booths and the answer to it.

Again the Lord goes up into a mountain—this time a high mountain—taking with Him only Peter, James, and John. These three are favored above the other disciples and chosen to witness certain great scenes not only because of their close friendship with Jesus, but also because of their representative roles. The twelve disciples picture all the good and useful affections which build up the church in each one of us. In their capacity of receiving and transmitting the Lord's instructions they represent the church. Peter, James, and John picture the three great essentials: faith, charity, and the works of charity (AE 820), or devotion to the Lord in mind, heart, and act. So they were chosen as symbolic of the church in the individual and in the world. The possession of these three essentials is necessary to the attainment of high spiritual experiences. When

we are in high spiritual states—the high mountain—lesser affections are temporarily left behind, and our essential devotion to the Lord is taken by Him “apart” to be the recipient of such deep revelation as He sees to be needed for our future development. Note that this experience follows “after six days,” the period of labor and struggle, like the six days of creation which must precede any spiritual attainment.

What was it that the three disciples saw? It was the real Christ, the divine humanity which had been taking form within the material shell—the body they knew—as the Lord lived out the life of the Word, fulfilling the Law and the Prophets. Because the soul looks out through the face, the face in the Word represents “the interiors.” In the transfiguration the Lord’s face “did shine as the sun,” because the Lord’s inmost was the divine love which warms our hearts. We are told that in the spiritual world the Lord appears as a sun, and that His love and wisdom are the sun of that world. And the Lord’s garments picture the truth in which His love clothes itself; so they were seen to be white as the light.

The minds of the three disciples had been prepared by instruction and by struggles with temptation to see the Lord as the living Word. Only a few days previously Peter had declared Him to be the Christ, and after this declaration the Lord had begun to teach His disciples about His coming death and resurrection, the final means of His glorification. Swedenborg tells us that everyone sees the Lord differently, according to the preparation he has made in his mind. When we come into the other world, we cannot see spiritual and divine things for which we have laid no basis in this world. If we form our idea of God correctly by studying His Word and His life and attempting to bring our minds and lives into conformity with His truth, we shall sometime see Him as the three disciples saw Him on the mountain. Later we shall study also the vision of Him which John saw on Patmos (Revelation 1:12-16). In Revelation 22:4 it is said of the Lord’s servants that in the Holy City “they shall see his face.” The Psalmist says: “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake,

with thy likeness." (Psalm 17:15) And we remember the blessing: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." If we seek to cherish in our lives the three essentials for which Peter, James, and John stand, we shall see Jesus Christ transfigured in our minds even in this world and clearly with our eyes when we come into the world where the sight of the mind is likewise the sight of the spiritual body. Read the blessing which the Lord gave through Moses for the children of Israel, the people who were to preserve the written Word, in Numbers 6:22-27.

The Lord came into the world to live out the truth which was expressed in another form in the written Word. He was the Word made flesh. Swedenborg says of the transfiguration that "the Lord represented Divine truth, which is the Word, for the Lord, when He was in the world, made His Human Divine truth, and when He went out of the world, He made His Human Divine good by uniting it with the Divine Itself, that was in Him from conception" (AE 594²). In order that the disciples might identify the truth which they saw lived out in Jesus with the truth as they had learned it in the Scriptures, they were permitted to see Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. *Elias* is the Greek form of *Elijah*. In the minds of the people of that day the Scriptures were divided into two great parts, the Law and the Prophets. Moses stood for the Law and Elijah for the Prophets. Later the Lord would show some of the disciples more specifically how the Law and the Prophets taught of Him: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24:27) The vision we are considering was a glimpse of the same truth.

This vision is intended for us also. There is a tendency in the Christian world today to pass by much of the Old Testament Scriptures, to think of them merely as showing the ancient Hebrew concept of God and as being superseded by the New Testament. The vision of Moses and Elijah talking with the Lord at the transfiguration teaches us that interiorly the Old Testament Scriptures are also "settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89), that they are forever and

inseparably connected with the Lord and must always be read and studied if we are to know Him. This is one pertinent lesson which we should draw from our story, confirming the fact which we have already noted that through prophecy and quotation the Old and New Testaments are so inextricably bound together that it is impossible to understand one without studying the other. In the vision of the transfiguration we see that this external connection is the result of a living internal connection. And the further details of the story show us a still deeper reason.

Peter, recognizing that the vision taught the holiness of the Law and the Prophets, proposed to make three tabernacles or tents, one for the Lord, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. A tabernacle is a symbol of worship. In its internal meaning Peter's desire expressed the threefold character of true worship—worship in the heart, in the outward life, and in the thoughts—but in the letter it shows a confusion in Peter's mind. The Lord does not appear to answer Peter's proposal, but the rest of the vision is actually an answer. Read verse 5. The bright cloud is the letter of the Word illumined by divine truth within. The voice is divine love speaking, and the words are the seal of authority which divine love sets upon divine truth. "And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only." The lifting up of the eyes pictures the lifting up of the understanding. They were finally given to see that all they had seen in vision was in Jesus, in the familiar friend whom they knew and loved. And this is what we should come to see also. In Jesus Christ "dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," says Paul (Colossians 2:9). Jesus is Jehovah our savior. Old and New Testament Scriptures alike treat of Him. He is the sole object of our worship.

As they came down from the mountain, the Lord told His disciples not to tell others of the vision until after His resurrection. The resurrection was to be the general "sign" for all the world. After it many would be ready to believe the report of the transfiguration who would not have believed it before. And as they came down, they were able to understand more clearly the mission

and work of John the Baptist. We cannot stay on the mount of vision, but as we come down again to practical everyday life, we can see our past experience in new light.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 594²: "In this transfiguration the Lord represented Divine truth, which is the Word; for the Lord, when He was in the world, made His Human Divine truth, and when He went out of the world He made His Human Divine good by uniting it with the Divine Itself, that was in Him from conception . . . Consequently the particular things that were seen when He was transfigured signify the proceeding of the Divine truth from the Lord's Divine good. The Divine good of Divine love which was in Him, and from which He had Divine truth in His Human, was represented by 'His face did shine as the sun'; for the 'face' represents the interiors, since these shine forth through the face; and the 'sun' signifies the Divine love. The Divine truth was represented by the 'garments' which became as the light; 'garments' in the Word signify truths, and 'the Lord's garments' Divine truth; this is why they appeared 'as the light'; for Divine truth makes the light of the angelic heaven, and is therefore signified by 'light' in the Word. . . . Because it was the Word, which is Divine truth, that was represented, therefore 'there appeared Moses and Elijah speaking with Him'; 'Moses and Elijah' signifying the Word; 'Moses' the historical Word, and 'Elijah' the prophetical Word. The Word in the letter was represented by the 'cloud that overshadowed the disciples, and into which they entered'; for the 'disciples' represented in the Word the church, which at that time and afterwards was only in truths from the sense of the letter; and because . . . revelations and responses are made by Divine truth in ultimates, and because this truth is such as is the truth of the sense of the letter of the Word, it came to pass that 'a voice was heard out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son, hear ye Him,' meaning that He is Divine truth, or the Word."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Who were the first four disciples the Lord chose? *Peter, Andrew, James, John*
- P. Who were the three who saw Him transfigured? *Peter, James, John*
- P. What does *transfigure* mean? *change of face*
- P. Where did they go with the Lord to see Him transfigured? *high mountain*
- P. Who were seen talking with Him? *Moses, Elijah*

- J. What did Peter want to do? *build three tents*
- J. What happened which frightened the disciples? *bright cloud, voice*
- P. Whom did they see afterward? *Jesus only*
- J. What did the Lord tell them about what they had seen? *Don't tell others*
- J. What question did they ask Him? *Why do scribes say, "Elijah must come first"?*
- J. What did He tell them? *John the Baptist fulfilled that prophecy*
- I. Why were Moses and Elijah seen with the Lord? *to show He embodies the Law and the Prophets*
- I. Why is John the Baptist brought into this story? *taught repentance (first step)*
- S. What is the great lesson of the transfiguration story? *it is possible for everyone who believes to see the Lord in His Word*

PALM SUNDAY

Matthew 21:1-27

There is no need of making a connection between this lesson and the last one. Special days can be treated as special, rather than in a series. In all classes it is enough to start by asking the pupils if they know what special day this is. The story itself is simple and striking and is easy to tell.

Doctrinal Points

The principle which rules our thought and conduct is our "king." We "cast our garments before the Lord" when we willingly give up ideas that are contrary to His teachings.

Only the Lord can cleanse the inner "temple" of our souls, driving out our false thoughts and selfish desires.

Notes for Parents

Palm Sunday commemorates the entry of the Lord into Jerusalem at the beginning of the last week of His life on earth. We know that throughout the three years of His public ministry the Lord had been going about through Palestine and the country beyond Jordan teaching, preaching, and healing. Although His power to heal drew crowds of people to follow Him, there is no record that He ever tried to attract the crowds or even that He was pleased to have them. In fact, He told them plainly that many of them were following Him merely for the loaves and fishes. He said without hesitation many things which He knew would drive many of them away, and it is often recorded that He withdrew from them and sought to be alone with His close disciples. If we take the Lord as our example, we shall do our Christian work quietly and without worrying about appealing to crowds. The Lord said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

The entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was the only time when the Lord purposely displayed the tokens of His real position, and this was in fulfillment of the prophecy spoken through the prophet Zechariah (Zechariah 9:9), for the Lord came, as He said, to "fulfill the law and the prophets." It was the custom of kings and judges to ride on asses, and the multitude hailed the Lord as king. The Lord knew that within the week which was beginning they would turn against Him and put Him to death. He was teaching them and us a lesson which every one of us needs.

A king is the accepted ruler of a nation. In our lives the principle which we have accepted to rule our thought and conduct is our "king." Each one of us, as you may remember from our lesson about Elijah, is given the choice of accepting the Lord or Baal—divine truth, or the principle of worldliness and self-interest—as our ruler. But we cannot divide our allegiance: as the Lord Himself tells us, "ye cannot serve God and mammon." When we try to serve both, it is our spiritual principles which are sacrificed, as the events of the last week of the Lord's earthly life show.

When the people welcomed the Lord into Jerusalem as king, they cast their garments and branches from the palm trees before Him. This is a picture of the willingness we should have to give up our own ideas—the garments in which we have clothed our souls—and to recognize that divine truth should rule us and that all power to bring happiness and peace to us and to the world is in the Lord alone.

But what all too often happens? The Lord's first act on entering Jerusalem was to drive out from the temple those who were using their religion for selfish gain. The temple symbolizes our character in its spiritual aspects. To cleanse the temple is to "search the soul" and expose and reject all its deep-seated selfishness. It was the cleansing of the temple which started the conflict that ended in the Lord's death on the cross.

Primary

Talk about the Lord, the ass, the garments on the ass, and the palm branches.

Dwell on the joy of the people, especially of the children, in welcoming the Lord. The lesson should end with at least a statement of the fact that within a few days the very people who welcomed the Lord on Palm Sunday turned against Him and put Him to death. The children can also understand that when they are good, they are welcoming the Lord into their hearts as king, and that whenever they are naughty, they are turning against Him.

This week is called "Holy Week," and today is Palm Sunday.

Can you tell why this is called Palm Sunday? (see John 12:13)

It was the beginning of the Lord's last week on earth.

On the first day of that week the Lord came to Jerusalem.

What did he tell two of His disciples to do?

How did He enter Jerusalem?

It was the custom of kings and judges to ride upon asses.

And it had been prophesied that the Messiah would come riding on an ass. Suppose we read this prophecy in Zechariah 9:9.

The people welcomed the Lord gladly, and especially the little children.

The chief priests and scribes did not like to hear Jesus praised.

But He told them that the little children who sang hosannas were wiser than they.

The priests, however, were very powerful, and the people listened to them.

They very soon turned against the Lord.

What did the Lord find in the temple?

Many of the people were making money for themselves out of the gifts that were brought to the temple for the Lord. They were really stealing from Him.

Before the week was over, they put Him to death.

The Lord knew they were going to do this, but He went to Jerusalem just the same.

If we love the Lord, we shall accept Him as our king and try to learn what He tells us is right.

And we shall try to be strong and brave enough to do right even when it is hard.

Junior

These children can get a good deal of the correspondence of this lesson, especially of the ass, the palm branches, and the garments. They should look up the various references in the Old Testament and see how many prophecies

were fulfilled literally. And the general lesson for their own lives should be impressed upon them. Children of this age are usually eager to learn and quick to receive, but equally quick to forget in the face of their daily environment. The surprise they will feel at the fickleness of the crowd can be made helpful to them if they were led to see how the same thing is true of themselves.

Today we commemorate the first day of the last week of the Lord's life on earth, and the events of that day.

Why is today called Palm Sunday?
What city was the Lord coming into?
What did He ride on?

It was the custom for kings and judges to ride upon asses. The ass, you know, is very sure-footed but also very stubborn and unwilling to be directed by his master. The ass is a picture of our natural reason, our "common sense," which always looks at the ground and never up to heaven. It leads us along very well in worldly matters, but there are many things it does not see. For instance, it is sometimes very hard for us to admit that unselfishness is really better and wiser than selfishness. Our common sense says, "Unselfishness doesn't get you anywhere." This is the ass speaking. The colt on which the Lord entered Jerusalem was one "whereon yet never man sat" (Luke 19:30). That is, the Lord was the first one ever to bring this power of the natural reason wholly under subjection to higher principles. Look up Zechariah 9:9 to see how the Lord was fulfilling prophecy.

When the Lord rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, His disciples hailed Him as king, casting their own garments and branches of the palm trees in His path for Him to ride over. This is a picture of what we should do. Our "garments" are the thoughts in which our feelings are dressed, and the palm branches are symbols of our belief in the Lord as our savior. All our own ideas should be submitted to the judgment of the Lord's truth, if we really recognize Him as our God and king.

What did the Lord do in the temple?

Doves were used as sacrifices. The law said that all the animals and birds used as sacrifices had to be perfect. Many people bought their

doves to sacrifice after they reached the temple, but even when they brought their own, it was not hard to find some small flaw and make them buy others. The temple offering had to be made in the "shekel of the sanctuary," and this was not a common coin. The moneychangers charged a fee for the exchange. The passage the Lord quoted is found in Isaiah 56:7 (cf. also Jeremiah 7:11).

The chief priests and scribes did not like to hear anyone praised but themselves, and they were afraid of the Lord's popularity. So the Lord again quoted Scripture to them. Read Psalm 8:2.

Where did the Lord go to lodge overnight?

The Lord had friends there. Look up John 11:1-5 and Luke 10:38-39.

What happened to the fig tree because the Lord found no fruit?

This is a picture of what happens to the soul of anyone whose religion does not bear the fruit of good deeds. The church of that day was in this state. When the Lord came to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He knew that He would be put to death. He could have saved Himself as He had many times before, but He knew that His death on the cross was necessary to the finishing of His work and to our salvation.

Intermediate

The best point to discuss with this age group is perhaps the correspondence of the ass and the necessity of submitting our natural reason—which judges according to appearances—to the rule of the Lord's truth. Remind them of our study of Saul.

In thinking of what Holy Week should mean to us, we should ask ourselves if we are like those people long ago who welcomed the Lord as king on Palm Sunday and put Him to death the following Friday.

Palm Sunday was the first day of the last week of the Lord's life on earth. He and His Apostles were coming to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. The Lord had told them that He was to be put to death, and they had tried to persuade Him not to go. But the Lord rebuked them. He came to His death willingly, as a part

of the work He had come into the world to do. So we should think of the cross as the symbol of victory over self, which the Lord won and which He gives us the power to win if we are faithful to His teachings.

The Lord rode into Jerusalem on an ass, after the fashion of kings and judges. The ass is the symbol of the natural reason, the thing we call common sense. Do you remember our lesson about Saul? Often the "common-sense" thing, the thing which seems to promise most immediate practical returns for ourselves or even for others, is not at all the thing which is wisest in the Lord's sight and so in the long run. Sometimes when we are being urged to do the right thing instead of the easiest thing and are tempted to say, "What's the sense of going to all that trouble?" it may help if we say to ourselves, "There speaks the ass." The Lord was the only one who ever really mastered this ass—that is, who ever brought the natural reason wholly under the control of divine truth.

What does it mean to accept the Lord as our king? First, it means that we really acknowledge that He is the one who is ruler of our life and that His laws are the laws to be obeyed. This is to cast palm branches before Him, for the palm tree is the symbol of the principle that the Lord alone can save us. Then we should determine that whenever we find that our ideas are not in accordance with the truth He gives us in His Word, we will give up our ideas. This is pictured by the people's casting their garments before the Lord. Our garments are the ideas in which our affections clothe themselves.

But the first act of the Lord after His triumphal entry was to drive the money-changers and vendors of doves out of the temple. What does this mean? The money-changers and vendors of doves symbolize all the selfish thoughts and feelings which have crept into our minds and hearts and are interfering with our true worship of the Lord. Can we stand having these driven out? The priests and scribes could not stand it, and they did not like to hear the innocent children crying "Hosanna" to the Lord. They did not want their rule interfered with. And the people, in spite of the miracles

of healing which the Lord also wrought in the temple, listened to the priests. The incident of the fig tree on which the Lord found no fruit is added here because it pictures the condition of the church, which carried on what looked like worship but which produced no fruits of good character and good works. Are we like the people of that time? Do we go to church and Sunday school and learn to know the Lord and His laws and then in our everyday life let our selfishness rule us and lead us to put the Lord and His truth out of our minds?

Basic Correspondences

ass = natural reason

palm tree = principle that the Lord alone can save
garment = ideas which "clothe" our affections

Senior

This class needs especially the reminder of the fickleness of the people and its result. Most young people "mean well" and are easily inspired to good resolutions, but many are as easily persuaded to break them when their everyday environment is worldly. Emphasis should be put on the story of the cleansing of the temple and its meaning.

We are all so familiar with the story of the Lord's entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of the last week of His life on earth that we need only review its meaning. Jerusalem stands for the place we have made for the Lord in our minds. He reigns there as king just so far as we actually accept the rule of divine truth. He enters riding upon an ass when we submit worldly reasonings to the control of spiritual principles. We cast our garments before Him when we are willing to give up our own ideas if we find that they are contrary to His teaching, and palm branches when we acknowledge His saving power. Then He can cleanse the inner temple of our souls, driving out false thoughts and selfish desires. And it is the "little children" in us, the innocent and trustful states, which are to be listened to.

The triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was, as the

Lord knew, really the beginning of the end. But the temporary support of the multitude gave Him an opportunity to cleanse the temple and to teach there, as He did during the first two days of the week, denouncing the scribes and Pharisees openly and prophesying the end of the age, which was necessary to the establishment of a new, genuine church. The fig tree which bore no fruit is a picture of the condition of the church in His time. In much the same way, there are moments in our lives when the sense of the Lord's kingship and power is so strong that we can see our own sins and hypocrisies in clear light and condemn them. Unfortunately, also like Jesus' contemporaries, we soon lose this fervor amid the temptations of our daily environment, but its effect persists and strengthens our small beginnings of regenerate life.

We think of the Palm Sunday lesson as a joyful one, and yet it is always shadowed by the thought of the dark events to come. The Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem actually took place "in the shadow of the cross." It should be a warning to us to examine ourselves carefully, to be steadfast in temptation, to let no selfish ambitions or fears rob us of our high purposes and lead us to crucify our king. Holy Week should be a time of humble self-examination, when we expose the scribes and Pharisees in our own minds and hearts and restore the states of innocence and trust and love which will enable us to partake worthily of the Holy Supper and to rejoice in the assurance of the risen Lord.

Adult

The special discussion topic for the Adults should be what it means in our individual life really to accept the Lord as our king, remembering that a king represents truth. It is not enough to have good intentions or even to do outward good works. We must study the Word regularly in the light of the writings of the Second Coming. The conflict which followed the Lord's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and its result show us clearly where the temptation is and how and why we all too often yield to it.

We remember the correspondence of the three parts of the Holy Land: Galilee, the outer life; Samaria, the thought life; Judea, the

life of the will. Whenever the Lord enters Judea, it is a picture of His desire to be present in our wills and to make them pure and holy. His final coming into Judea and His work there during the last week of His earthly life picture the searching of our inmost will to see whether it will receive or reject Him. Our lesson today shows that many of the people received Him gladly, recognizing Him as their king and savior; but we know that the political power in Jerusalem was still in the hands of His enemies and that they finally persuaded the people to reject and crucify Him. On the Sunday before the resurrection the Lord entered Jerusalem riding upon an ass, as kings and judges had done in Old Testament times, and acclaimed as the "son of David," the Messiah, multitudes casting their garments in His path and waving branches of palms, the recognized symbol of victory. The multitudes acclaimed Him because they had seen His wonderful works of healing and resurrection. They thought they were ready to accept Him as their king. In much the same way, when we have recognized the power of the Lord to make over the external life, to restore the faculties men have allowed to become sick and even to die through neglect or abuse, we think we are ready to welcome Him into our minds and hearts as king.

A king is one who rules, whose laws his people accept and obey, who is looked to as the final authority. If we really accept the Lord as our king, we will obey His laws and recognize Him as our final authority—we will not merely call upon Him to save us from the consequences of our follies and misdeeds. Are we ready to do this? The final test for us is pictured in the results of the Lord's entry into Jerusalem. The Lord's rule is not always what we want it to be. He does not support our selfish desires and ambitions. His law often cuts directly across the path we wish to follow, and says "Stop!" In our hearts and minds are "priests and Pharisees," selfish feelings and thoughts which do not wish to submit to the Lord's rule, as well as a few loving "disciples" who wish to see Him on the throne. The "multitudes" are all our everyday thoughts and affections, which are swayed this way and that according to the

deep currents of our souls. Our final test as Christians is whether or not we allow ourselves to be persuaded by our hereditary selfishness. For if we do, we shall finally reject the Lord's rule, even though we have seen it to be right and best. A great many of us see that the Christian life is the right and happy life and are willing to correct our ordinary conduct according to Christian principles and to learn to live an outwardly orderly life for the sake of the obvious benefits which result from such conduct. We are anxious to call ourselves Christians, to acclaim the Lord as king, because we see what Christianity has done for the world and for individuals. But when we really try to open our hearts and minds and submit them to the Lord's cleansing control, we find the chief priests and Pharisees too strong for us and yield to their insistence that we free Barabbas and crucify the Lord.

In Zechariah 9:9 it is prophesied that the Lord would enter Jerusalem "riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." We learn from the writings (AC 2781) that the ass (properly translated "she-ass") and colt picture the natural man as to good and truth, and that the Lord's riding upon them not only shows that He claimed the prerogatives of king and judge but also represents the fact that He subordinated the natural planes of mind and heart to the divine. In Mark [11:2; also in Luke 19:30] the colt is said to be one "whereon never man sat." The Lord alone completely reduced the natural plane to order and made it serve its true use. In the statement that the disciples placed their clothes on the ass for the Lord to ride upon we see pictured the attitude of the true disciple who submits his own ideas to the Lord's government and correction. The same thing is represented by the fact that the multitudes "spread their garments in the way." Palm trees picture "spiritual good, or the good of truth" (AC 8369). The palm branches which the people carried and strewed in the way of the Lord thus represent genuine affection for divine truth, through which alone the Lord can be victorious in anyone's life and reign there as king. For this reason the ancient Hebrews were commanded to bring palm branches at the feast of the ingathering (Leviticus

23:40), palm trees were carved upon the walls and doors of Solomon's temple (I Kings 6:29, 32), and the multitude who stood before the throne in John's vision had palms in their hands (Revelation 7:9). It is also said of the righteous, those who practice the truth and so are in the good of truth, that they "shall flourish like the palm tree" (Psalm 92:12).

This was one of the first fruits of the Lord's entry into Jerusalem—He went into the temple and drove out the money-changers and overthrew the seats of those who sold doves, those who were profaning the temple by turning its worship to their own selfish advantage. The temple, the Lord's house, is the symbol of the church in each one of us. It is meant to be a "house of prayer." That is, the purpose of worship is to open the mind and heart to the Lord, acknowledging our weakness and need, and seeking instruction and help. But the temple had, both literally and figuratively, become a den of thieves. The sale of animals for sacrifice and the changing of ordinary money into the shekel of the sanctuary had come to be carried on for profit within the very court of the temple itself. And the scribes and Pharisees had come to use their outward piety to win reputation and power for themselves. The money-changers picture the use of the Scriptures for selfish ends, and the vendors of doves trading on pretended piety to win reputation and honor. Therefore the cleansing of the temple was one of the first things the Lord did after He entered Jerusalem as king. When the Lord is received into our inner lives as king, the selfish motives which have previously been in our religious life are exposed. Why have we called ourselves Christians? Has it always been from a genuine desire to learn of the Lord, to see our own faults, and to obtain the Lord's help in overcoming them? How often do we go to church to be seen of men? How often do we give because we are ashamed not to instead of because we really want to? How often do we sit in church and think how the sermon applies to someone else? The genuine recognition of the Lord leads us to recognize these attitudes of mind for what they are and to try with all our might to drive them out.

It is significant that the Lord did not spend the night in Jerusalem, but lodged with his friends Mary and Martha and Lazarus in Bethany. It is in our daytime states, when we are able to see clearly, that we make progress against our evils. And in the morning we have the incident of the fig tree. In the triad of olive, vine, and fig, the fig represents outward conduct, good in the outward life. And as the church of that day was a wholly external church, the fig tree was its special symbol. So the Lord's finding no fruit on the fig tree is symbolic of the fact that that church no longer bore its proper fruit and had come to its end as the representative of the Lord's church in the world. So the fig tree withered away. This little incident was a divinely appointed herald also of what the people were about to do to the Lord, destroying their own life by rejecting Him. We, too, die spiritually when we do not "practice what we preach."

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 2781: "To 'ride upon an ass' was a sign that the natural was made subordinate; and to 'ride upon a colt, the son of a she-ass' was the sign that the rational was made subordinate . . . From this their signification, and because it belonged to the highest judge and to a king to ride upon them, and at the same time that the representatives of the church might be fulfilled, it pleased the Lord to do this. . . . From all this it is now evident that all and everything in the church of that period was representative of the Lord, and therefore of the celestial and spiritual things that are in His kingdom—even to the she-ass and the colt of a she-ass, by which the natural man as to good and truth was represented. The reason of the representation was that the natural man ought to serve the rational, and this the spiritual, this the celestial, and this the Lord: such is the order of subordination."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. What is today called? *Palm Sunday*
- J. What does the day commemorate? *the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem*
- P. What did the Lord ride when He entered Jerusalem? *an ass*
- P. What did the disciples put on the ass? *their garments*

- P. What did the people strew before the Lord as He rode? *palm branches and garments* .
- P. What did the multitude cry? *Hosanna!*
- J. Where did the Lord go when He entered Jerusalem? *the temple*
- J. What did He do there? *drove out money-changers and dove-sellers*
- J. What did He say about the temple? *it was to be a house of prayer*
- J. What else did He do in the temple? *healed the blind and the lame*
- J. Where did He go to spend the night? *Bethany*
- J. Who lived there? *Mary, Martha, and Lazarus*
- I. What is pictured by the Lord's riding into Jerusalem on an ass? *that He alone had brought His natural reason under divine control*
- I. What do the palm branches picture? *that the Lord alone can save*
- S. What does it mean in our lives to accept the Lord as king? *to acknowledge that His laws rule our lives and are to be obeyed*

THE LORD'S LAST DAYS ON EARTH

Matthew 26; 27

Part of the lesson time must be spent upon the literal story of the trial and crucifixion to be sure the order of events is known. The principal effort should be to bring out the thought that the cross symbolizes victory, the victory of the Lord's goodness and truth over all the forces of evil. It should also be pointed out that the Lord's victory can enable us to conquer, if we accept His guidance and look to Him for strength. We must obey Him if we are to be partakers in His victory. In telling of the betrayal suggest that we also may betray the Lord by not trying to live according to the teachings we profess to believe. All the classes should be told that the Holy Supper was instituted by the Lord during His last celebration of the Passover, and that it takes the place of the Passover for the Christian Church.

Doctrinal Points

The cross symbolizes the Lord's victory over evil.

There is no temptation we can face which the Lord did not face and overcome.

The Holy Supper takes the place of the Passover for the Christian Church.

Notes for Parents

Our lesson on Palm Sunday told us how the Lord entered Jerusalem on the first day of the last week of His earthly life and was welcomed as a king.

When we read the rest of the story of that week, we may at first wonder how the people could so easily have been persuaded to turn against the Lord and put Him to death, but if we remember how often we make good resolutions and almost immediately break them, we shall understand.

There are three incidents in these two chapters which bring this lesson home to us. One is the act of Judas and his later repentant despair. We are accustomed to think of Judas as the example of everything bad, but Judas often shows himself in us. Whenever we do what we know to be wrong in order to obtain some immediate advantage, "Judas" is acting in us.

The second incident is the desertion of the Lord by all His disciples when He was captured (Matthew 26:56). And the third is the story of Peter's triple denial of the Lord. The fear of what "other people" will think and do undoubtedly sometimes keeps us from doing wrong, but also sometimes it may keep us from doing right. The really strong man or woman is the one who studies the teachings of the Lord in the Word for himself, meditates on them, and carries them out steadily no matter what others may think or do. Remember the first two verses of the first Psalm.

This is what the whole story of the Lord's earthly life teaches us, and especially the story of His death on the cross. He knew the hearts of all men—of the people and of His disciples. He knew just what was going to happen. And He went steadily forward, overcoming each temptation as it came, and fulfilling the Law and the Prophets, until He could say, "It is finished."

For the New Church the cross is the symbol of the Lord's victory, of the final triumph of divine love over all the evils that had accumulated in human nature. It stands forever as a sign to us that if we will only be faithful, nothing that happens to us in this world can harm our souls. "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." The Lord of His own will permitted the people to do their worst to Him in order to prove to them and to all men in all times that "with God all things are possible."

Primary

If you center the lesson around Peter's denial of the Lord, you can impress upon the children the importance of being faithful to the Lord—that is, of doing right because the Lord says it is right, no matter how strong may be our temptation to do wrong. Use the simple story of the rejection and crucifixion

of the Lord as a background for this major lesson. Give as much as possible of the simple story of the Lord's last week on earth, connecting it with the Palm Sunday lesson. Stress the Lord's victory on the cross and what it means for us. Tell the children that there is not a single temptation which they feel that the Lord did not feel and overcome, and that if we keep Him close to us always in our minds and pray to Him when we are tempted, He will give us strength to say "no" to our bad impulses and thoughts.

You remember how the Lord rode into Jerusalem on an ass on Palm Sunday, and how the people welcomed Him as king. That was the beginning of the last week of the Lord's life on earth. The people would have been glad to have Him rule over them, for they knew how much He could do for them, but their leaders did not want Him because they wanted to go on having their own way and telling everybody else what to do. So they told the people that Jesus was not their king, and they finally persuaded them that He should be put to death.

He spent Monday and Tuesday teaching in the temple.

At night He went out to Bethany to stay with His friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

Jerusalem was crowded with people who had come to celebrate the Passover. Do you remember what the Passover was?

On Thursday evening the Lord and His disciples ate the feast together in Jerusalem.

The Lord knew all that was going to happen, and He knew that even His twelve closest disciples would not stand by Him. At His last meal with them, He told them that one of them would betray Him. This meant that one of them would tell His enemies how they could capture Him. When the Lord told the disciples this, do you think they began to look at each other and say, "Are you the one?"

What did every one of them ask Him?

[Read Matthew 26:22.] Try to remember this verse, for it teaches us that we should all recognize how easily we ourselves do wrong, and that we should be ready to blame ourselves rather than always trying to put the blame on somebody else.

The Lord showed them how to keep a new feast instead of the Passover.

All Christian people keep this feast in memory of the Lord.
Do you know what it is called?
After supper where did the Lord and His disciples go?
How did Judas betray the Lord?
The Lord was tried before the religious court and then before the Roman governor.
No real fault could be found with Him, so they had the people lie about Him.
They put Him to death because they did not want to live as He taught them.
What was done with the Lord's body?
See how much you can remember of the Easter story.

Junior

Do something in this class with the history of the Passover and the institution of the Holy Supper in its place. Then go on to the story of the trial, crucifixion, and burial, and end with the meaning of the cross in our own lives.

How did the Lord enter Jerusalem on Palm Sunday?
What did the multitudes feel about Him?
What did the children shout?
The Lord knew that this feeling would not last. Read Matthew 20:17-19.

The Lord spent Monday and Tuesday of His last week teaching in the temple, but by that time the feeling against Him, stirred up by the scribes and Pharisees and priests, grew so strong that He did not come into the city on Wednesday. For He did not sleep in the city. At night He went out to Bethany, a little village nearby, and stayed at the home of His friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Then on Thursday evening He came into the city again to celebrate the feast of the Passover with His disciples, knowing just what was going to happen to Him.

What did the Passover feast commemorate?
During supper, what new feast did the Lord institute?

The Lord told His disciples that the bread was His body and the wine His blood. He was speaking to them in a parable as He always did. Our real selves are our feelings and thoughts. The real "body and blood" of the Lord are His goodness and truth. So when people partake of the Holy Supper, it is a symbol of their desire to receive

the Lord's unselfish love into their hearts and His truth into their minds.

Where did the Lord go to pray after the supper?
What was His prayer?

When we pray to be saved from some physical disaster or to be relieved of some physical affliction, we should always remember to add, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt," for the Lord knows and does what is best for each one of us.

Who betrayed the Lord?
Did the Lord know he was going to do it?
Why did He not stop him?
What tempted Judas to betray his best friend?

We read that when he realized what he had done, he went out and hanged himself. We often do things we know to be wrong, imagining that somehow nothing really bad will come of it, and then we are horrified at the actual results.

Read carefully the story of the Lord's trial and crucifixion. Judea had its own king in the time of the Lord, as well as its own priesthood, but it was subject to the Roman Empire, and the Roman governor was the only one who had power to condemn a man to death. The Lord's trial was a false trial. If you will read the testimony that was brought against Him and His answers, you will see that no proof was even offered that He was not what He claimed to be—they simply refused to believe Him. The real reason they put Him to death was that if they had accepted His statement that He was the Messiah, they would have been bound in the eyes of the people to accept what He said of the true way of life, and they did not want to change their ways or lessen their selfish control over the people.

What did the disciples do when the Lord was seized?
What did Peter do?
How was the Lord put to death?
What was done with His clothing?
Where was His body placed?
What measures were taken to prevent His resurrection?

These two chapters show us that even the temptation to do wrong in order to save our lives can be overcome in the Lord's strength. The cross is the sign of the Lord's final and complete victory over all the temptations which men can ever feel. Whenever we are tempted, if we think of the Lord and ask His help, we shall be able to stand firm.

Intermediate

Since the Intermediates are or will soon be of proper age for confirmation, stress the institution and correspondence of the Holy Supper. Then go on to the meaning of the crucifixion and the correspondence of some of its details, letting the interest of the young people determine which you discuss.

When the Lord entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday the people, who really wanted His help, received Him gladly; but the scribes and Pharisees, who feared that He would take away their power, were displeased at His coming. The Lord did not try to please them. During Monday and Tuesday He taught boldly in the temple, and much of His teaching was unhesitating condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees and admonition to the people not to follow their example. At first, for fear of the people, the priests and scribes did not dare molest Him, but gradually they succeeded in turning the people against Him, so that by Tuesday night He left the city not to return until Thursday night, when He came in for the Passover feast. Throughout the week He spent His nights at the home of His friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany.

There is a deep spiritual reason why the Lord was crucified during the celebration of the Passover week. He is called the Paschal Lamb. The crucifixion was the culmination of a long succession of struggles and victories by means of which He overcame the hells, the powers of evil which had grown so strong in the world that no man could resist them in his own strength. As the Passover commemorated deliverance from bondage in Egypt, so the Holy Supper, instituted by the Lord to take its place for all Christians, commemorates our deliverance by Him from bondage to hell. He said

that the bread and wine were His body and blood, and this means that they are symbols of the divine love and wisdom which we must receive into our hearts and minds if we are to be His followers.

The Lord could have saved Himself from the cross. Read Matthew 26:53. But if He had stopped short of physical death, He could not have shown us the way through it. He could have saved Himself by so mighty a miracle that all His enemies would have been forced to recognize Him as God. But their hearts would not have been changed. They would have obeyed Him through fear, but they would have been no happier. They would merely have been His slaves instead of the devil's. The Lord does not want slaves.

The rejection of the Lord by the people after He had been received as king marked the end of their church as the means of the Lord's presence among men. Judas, among the Apostles, pictured the ancient Jewish Church. So he betrayed the Lord and then killed himself. When we acknowledge the truth and then reject it because we do not want to live according to it, we kill the truth in our minds and as a result cause our own spiritual death. The end of that church as an intermediary between the Lord and men was also pictured by the rending of the veil of the temple at the time of the crucifixion.

The parting of the Lord's garments among the soldiers and the casting of lots was in fulfillment of a prophecy which we find in Psalm 22:18. John 19:23-24 gives us a little fuller account of this. The Lord's garments stand for the letter of the Word, and His "coat" or inner garment pictures the internal sense. People today "divide the Lord's garments" when they accept from the letter of the Word only what they can use to support what they want to believe. But the internal sense cannot be treated in this way—it is "woven without seam."

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (John 19:38-40) were members of the church's high court or Sanhedrin. They had not agreed with the others in condemning the Lord. They were not brave enough to stand alone against the almost overwhelming opinion, but after the crucifixion they had influence enough with

Pilate to be given the permission to care for the Lord's body, and they placed it in a new tomb. The request of the chief priest and Pharisees to have the tomb sealed and guarded showed that they were afraid of the Lord even after they had rejected Him. When people today reject the Lord, they sometimes spend a great deal of effort in bolstering up their position with arguments, not realizing that the arguments are merely foolishness in the ears of those who believe in the Lord and have experienced His power in their own lives.

Basic Correspondences

the bread of the Holy Supper = divine love

the wine of the Holy Supper = divine wisdom

the Holy Supper = the reception of the Lord's love and wisdom, which alone can deliver us from bondage to evil

Senior

The difference between the New Church teaching and that of some other churches in regard to the crucifixion is important for this class. The general story will be familiar to most of them. What is pictured by Judas and his betrayal of the Lord should be brought out, as well as the transition from the ancient Hebrew to the Christian dispensation.

The triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was, as the Lord knew, really the beginning of the end. But the temporary support of the multitude gave the Lord an opportunity to denounce the scribes and Pharisees openly and to cleanse the temple. In much the same way, there are moments in our lives when our sense of the Lord's kingship and power is so strong that we can see our own sins and hypocrisies in clear light and condemn them. Like the crowd we soon lose this fervor amid the temptations of our daily environment, but its effect persists and strengthens in us the small beginnings of regenerate life.

We have in us all the qualities represented by the twelve disciples including Judas, who represents the quality of the Jewish Church

of that day, which was in externals of worship without its internal. It was at the close of the Passover feast that Judas betrayed the Lord. The very truth which guides and supports the good merely incites in the evil greater resistance. When at this feast the Lord instituted the Holy Supper, He called the bread and wine His body and blood because they represent His goodness and truth. The reception of these by Judas resulted immediately in His betrayal of the Lord. We should remember this when we come to the Lord's supper, and be sure there is no hypocrisy in our reception of it.

Swedenborg tells us that the Lord's final and supreme temptation was the temptation to save men against their wills. In submitting to death upon the cross instead of saving Himself by a miracle He overcame this temptation. To do what is right "as it is written" in the face of popular scorn, of desertion by one's friends, of inevitable suffering is proof of the highest courage. This is what the cross means both in the Lord's life and in the lives of all of us His followers who are bidden to take up our cross and follow Him.

We should not be led to the Lord by pity for His suffering, but by admiration of His courage and by love of the qualities manifested in His earthly life, which are divine qualities. It is curious that many people today profess to be followers of the Lord while rejecting the Gospel accounts of His life, the only source of men's knowledge of Him. Such people merely use the historical figure of Christ as an effigy on which to hang their own worldly ideas of what is admirable, just as the Roman soldiers clothed the condemned Lord in a purple robe and gave Him mock worship.

All the details of the crucifixion and burial of the Lord in their spiritual sense describe the states of the church at that time. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (John 19:38-40) represent the "intellectual" element, the chief priests and scribes the perverted element, and the Roman soldiers the Gentiles, whose minds were at least not closed willfully against the truth. The parting of the Lord's garments among the soldiers pictures the way in which people accept such truths as they see to be useful without taking the whole. The Lord's garments picture the Word in its letter. The

"vesture" on which they cast lots was the inner garment, and represents the internal sense of the Word, which cannot be divided as the letter can.

Adult

There are two aspects of the lesson which are especially important for the Adults: the difference between the New Church teaching concerning the cross and the ideas prevailing in some other churches, and what betrayal of the Lord is in our own lives. The teacher should study the Intermediate and Senior notes also.

The Holy Supper is the one great feast of the Christian Church. It takes the place of the Passover and of all the feasts and sacrifices prescribed for the ancient Jewish Church. As the Passover commemorated deliverance from bondage in Egypt, so the Holy Supper commemorates our deliverance from bondage to the hells. The Lord Himself is "the Lamb that was slain" for our salvation, and the bread and wine of the Holy Supper are symbols of His body and blood, which are divine good and divine truth, as He Himself told His apostles. The "bread" which nourishes our souls is divine good, and the "wine" which refreshes us is divine truth. The Lord invites us all to partake of these for the strengthening of our souls against evil and falsity and their nourishment unto eternal life.

The name *Gethsemane* means "oil press." Oil is a symbol of love. The oil press is a picture of temptation as to love, the deepest temptation of all. The Lord went to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives with His apostles after the last supper, knowing that Judas had agreed to betray Him. The physical suffering which He was to undergo was doubtless not even in His thoughts when He prayed that the cup might pass from Him. He did not have Himself in mind in His prayer—He never had Himself in mind—but those who were to reject the salvation which he had come to give them, as well as those who, having become His followers, were to yield to the weakness of the flesh and desert Him. He longed to save them all from committing these sins and to save them by force of His very divine power in spite of their own perverted wills.

The fact that even this deepest temptation came from what remained of His assumed humanity is shown by the change in the form of His prayer. He prayed three times, representing His turning to the Divine with all three planes, but only the first and most external prayer admitted the possibility of any change in the divine order which He was fulfilling. His disciples fell asleep, as we all do. Their sleep is a picture of our inability to keep our minds awake to spiritual realities, of our proneness to fall back into natural ways of thinking even when we have been instructed in the truth, to think in terms of worldly standards and values. This is to be spiritually asleep. So the Lord says to us, as well as to the apostles: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

In the Christian world Judas has come to be a symbol of all that is despicable. This has led to the question of why the Lord chose Judas in the first place to be one of His apostles, since the Lord knows the hearts of all. But we must distinguish between Judas the man and Judas the representative. In chapter 27 we learn that Judas recognized his sin and tried to undo it, and finally hanged himself from remorse. And Swedenborg tells us that after *True Christian Religion* was completed the original twelve apostles were sent throughout the spiritual world to proclaim the Second Coming; so we may well infer that Judas the man found his home in the heavens. From the writings we learn that he represents the church of that time, which was then in the love of the externals of worship. The affection for the externals of worship is a necessary and valuable affection but one which is easily led astray. When we, as did the scribes and Pharisees, put on outward piety as a cloak for inner selfishness and in order that we may have worldly honor and power, we are like Judas betraying the Lord with a kiss, for all outward worship purports to love the Lord.

The Lord made no effort to prevent Judas from betraying Him; neither would He permit His disciples to use force against the enemies who came to seize Him. It was necessary that His enemies be permitted to do their worst in order that His glory might after-

ward appear. As He said, He could have summoned "more than twelve legions of angels" at His will to restrain His enemies, but this would have been contrary to the divine purpose of leaving men in freedom. We are often tempted to try to force the truth upon others who do not want it, or to fight evil with its own weapons. But this method never succeeds. Truth is steadfast and uninsistent; only falsity is violent and anxious to dominate. The same weakness which prompted Peter to draw his sword led him to forsake the Lord after He was seized and to deny Him while He was being tried, for it was the feeling that material power is greater than spiritual power. It is the same weakness which prompts people in the church today to try to make the church succeed by doing "what everybody else does," and leave the church when it does not appear to be prospering.

The Lord was tried first by the people themselves before Caiaphas the high priest. We recall that the Jews, in comparison with other nations, represent the church in us, our relation to the Lord. This is where the real trial of the Lord in us always takes place. The Lord refused to argue with Caiaphas or even to answer the false witnesses who were brought against Him. He merely asserted His divinity and pointed to the time when He would appear as their judge, and left them free to decide as they chose. So He does with us. We have all the evidence which the people then had. The Gospels stand for all time as authentic records of the Lord's life and claim. If we reject Him, it is not because of lack of evidence: it is simply because we do not wish to accept Him, because we prefer to follow our own guidance, to have our own way. The trial before Pilate represents merely our confirmation by reasonings of the decision of our will.

Many in the first Christian church theoretically and also actually regarded the cross as a punishment. Many today believe that on the cross the Lord suffered the punishment which men deserved, and so paid the price of our salvation. This is the doctrine called "vicarious atonement." Many others—perhaps the majority—nominally reject this doctrine; yet actually many still believe it, for

they believe that because they call themselves Christians they will be saved, even if they live and think as they please, ignoring the Lord's teaching and rejecting the Scriptures which are our only source of knowledge of Him. They think of the crucifixion as a defeat and a tragedy, and feel bound to the Lord by pity for His voluntary suffering. This is not the New Church doctrine.

The passion of the cross was the Lord's final victory over all the temptations which beset our finite humanity and to which we so often yield, the final putting off of all the limitations and weaknesses which He had voluntarily assumed in the humanity He took on from Mary, in order to meet and overcome the evil forces which men had created by their misuse of His gifts and with which He could not have come in contact in any other way.

The cross teaches us that evil and falsity have no power against goodness and truth, that if we choose to walk with the Lord, not even death itself can hurt us. The thought of the cross should inspire us to say with the four and twenty elders (Revelation 11:17): "We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come: because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned."

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 400¹⁴: "It is recorded in the Word that there was an earthquake when the Lord suffered upon the cross, and also when the angel descended and rolled away the stone from the mouth of the sepulchre . . . These earthquakes occurred to indicate that the state of the church was then changed; for the Lord by His last temptation, which He endured in Gethsemane and upon the cross, conquered the hells, and put in order all things there and in the heavens, and also glorified His Human, that is, made it Divine; for this reason 'there was an earthquake, and the rocks were rent.' 'The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom' signified that His Human was made Divine . . ."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. What happened on Palm Sunday? *the Lord's triumphal entry*

- J. Why had the Lord come to Jerusalem? *to observe Passover*
- J. What new feast did the Lord establish as He ate His last Passover?
Holy Supper
- P. What did He say one of His twelve disciples would do? *betray Him*
- P. What did each one ask? *Is it I?*
- P. Which one betrayed the Lord? *Judas Iscariot*
- J. How did Judas betray Him? *with a kiss*
- J. What did all the disciples do when the Lord was captured? *fled*
- P. What had the Lord told Peter he would do? *deny Him*
- P. Did Peter think he would deny the Lord? *no*
- P. Did he do it? *yes—three times*
- P. What made him remember what the Lord had said? *cock crowed*
- J. Before whom was the Lord first tried? *Caiaphas, the high priest*
- J. Who had to pronounce the final sentence? *Pilate, the Roman governor*
- J. What choice did Pilate give them? *to free Jesus or Barabbas*
- J. How was the Lord put to death? *crucifixion*
- J. What was done with His body? *placed in a new tomb hewn in rock*
- J. How did they try to guard against His resurrection? *sealed tomb, set guard*
- I. What do the bread and wine in the Holy Supper represent? *the Lord's divine love and wisdom*
- S. What does the cross mean to us? *a sign that evil and falsity have no real power against goodness and truth*

EASTER

Matthew 28

In the younger classes the teacher should start with a brief review of the Palm Sunday lesson and then tell the children as simply as possible the story of the last week of the Lord's life on earth. He spent the first two days of the week teaching in the temple, but at night He went out of the city to Bethany, the home of His friends Mary and Martha and Lazarus. On Thursday evening He went into the city again and celebrated the Passover feast with His disciples. It was at this feast that He instituted the Holy Supper, which in the Christian Church takes the place of the Passover. After supper He went out to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, and it was there that the crowd, led by Judas, seized Him. He was tried before the high priest, before Herod, and finally before Pilate, the Roman governor. No fault could be found in Him except by the use of false witnesses, but they demanded His death, and on Friday He was crucified. This review of events should be given in full to the Juniors but more briefly to the younger ones.

Doctrinal Points

Disbelief in the resurrection is willful, not logical.

Easter means not only belief in a future life. It also means belief in the power of love over hate, of truth over falsity, in all of life. The Lord's resurrection teaches that the Lord is always with us even though we cannot see Him with our physical eyes.

Notes for Parents

Easter is really the most important day in the church year, for although on Christmas we celebrate the Lord's coming into the world to be our savior, on Easter we celebrate not only the completion of the work He came to do but the glorious assurance that He is present with us forever in His divine humanity.

Most of us are familiar with the Easter story. Has anyone ever said to you, "How do we know there is another life? No one has ever come back to tell us about it"? And if you thought to answer, "The Lord came back and told us," the person may say, "That's what the Bible says, but how do we know it's true?" We need to have the answer ready for that one, too. When the Lord was crucified, all His disciples—even the closest ones—thought everything was over, that they had made a mistake, that Jesus could not have been what He claimed to be. Some of them lingered in Jerusalem talking it over. Others went back immediately to their former occupations. If the resurrection had not taken place, they would have had no Gospel to preach and there would have been no Christian Church to change the whole course of history. It is as simple as that.

The resurrection itself changed history, and belief in it—real belief—changes the life of the person who believes. For it involves the acknowledgment that Jesus Christ was what He claimed to be: "the resurrection and the life," "the way, the truth, and the life," the heavenly Father revealing Himself to men. It means that it is God Himself who speaks to us in the Gospels and in the Word of the Old Testament, too, which He said taught of Him. It means, therefore, that it is our highest duty and privilege, as men and women, to read and study the Word and to try to form our lives on the pattern He gives us there. It means not only that death is not to be feared, but that it is the gateway to our real life and that our life in this world—whether long or short—is merely our beginning and our early school, our opportunity to learn how to live.

When we see this, we are like the disciples meeting the risen Lord on the mountain in Galilee. The whole plane of our thinking is lifted above worldly and selfish considerations. We breathe a purer air and we see our life in this world spread out before us in its true proportions and relations under the sun of heaven. Our difficulties and trials, which loomed so large in our former thought, now look small, and the lovely scenes that always lie beyond them appear.

The Lord says to us on Easter day, as He said to the disciples on the mountain in Galilee: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" and "Lo, I am with you all the days, even to the consummation of the age." The Lord is always with us, closer than any earthly friend, with power to enable us to overcome our temptations, to meet all our trials as opportunities for spiritual growth, to bring comfort and help to those around us, and so to become children of our heavenly Father and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.

Primary

Center your story on the first ten verses of the chapter and try to impress the children with the reason why we celebrate Easter. Get their minds away from the thought of bunnies and Easter eggs. Tell them something of what it meant to the disciples and what it means to us to know that the Lord conquered even death and that our own life goes right on just the same after the body dies. Tell them it was to teach us this that the Lord allowed Himself to be put to death.

On what day did the Lord come to Jerusalem for the last time?

How did He enter it?

Were the people glad to see Him?

What did He do in the temple?

Within a few days the people turned against the Lord.

Because He told them about their sins, they put Him to death.

The Lord knew all the time that this was going to happen, but He knew what would happen afterward, too, and He was not at all afraid to die. On Thursday night He came back into the city to eat the feast of the Passover with His twelve special disciples. And afterward He let the crowd capture Him, and the next day, Friday, He let them put Him to death.

Two of the leaders who had not agreed with the others got permission from the Roman governor to care for His body. They prepared it for burial in the Jewish fashion and placed it in a new sepulchre or tomb cut out of the rock. A great stone was rolled against the entrance of this sepulchre and it was sealed so that no one could get in. A guard of soldiers was also placed near it.

Who came to the sepulchre very early on Sunday morning?

Mary Magdalene was a woman whom the Lord had healed.

The "other Mary" was the mother of one of the apostles.

What did the women find?

What are we told had happened when the angel descended from heaven?

What did the angel tell the women?

Who met the women as they went to tell the disciples?

What did He tell them to do?

What day do we celebrate in the church in memory of the resurrection?

It is because the Lord rose on Sunday morning that Sunday is called the Lord's day.

This is also the reason why we observe Sunday as the sabbath, instead of Saturday.

After He had talked with His disciples, what did the Lord command them to do?

Forty days after the resurrection the disciples saw the Lord ascend into heaven.

We may read the story of the ascension in Luke 24:50-53. (Cf. Acts 1:1-9.)

But the Lord promised to be with us always, and He is always with us even though we cannot see Him.

Junior

Try to find time for studying the first part of the chapter and also to take up verses 11-20, and to compare this account with the accounts given in Mark 16, Luke 24:1-12, and John 20:1-18.

What was last Sunday called?

What did the Lord do on that day?

How was He received?

What did He do in the temple?

The disciples thought the Lord was now accepted by all. But the religious leaders and most of the people were looking for a king who would overthrow the Roman government and make Judah a great nation again. They did not want a king who would expect them to change themselves. So they soon turned against the Lord and put Him to death. The Lord was crucified on Friday. During Saturday, the Jewish sabbath, His body lay in the tomb. But early Sunday morning the women who had loved Him came to the sepulchre. Mark and Luke tell us that they brought spices to anoint his body.

What did they find?
Who told them that the Lord had risen?
What had happened when the angel descended from heaven?
As they went away, who met them?
What did He tell them to do?

The accounts of the resurrection in the four Gospels are different in some ways. All the events recorded actually happened. No two people seeing an event remember exactly the same details, but we know that the words of all the Gospels were inspired by the Lord. That is, the Lord recalled to the mind of each of the four writers just what He wanted him to record and gave them the words in which to record it. When you begin to study the Scriptures in their internal sense, you will find that each story of the resurrection has its special lessons.

When the Lord was crucified, all the disciples forsook Him and fled. We read in several places how disheartened they were. They had put all their hopes in Him and He had apparently failed. Suppose they had never seen Him alive again. They would have returned to their homes and taken up their old occupations. They would have remembered some of the things He had told them, but they would have had no Gospel—no “good news”—to preach. There would have been no Christian Church.

How did the leaders try to prevent the truth's being told?
Some people who do not want to believe in the Lord still say the same things.

The Lord passed through death to prove to the disciples and to us that He really is “the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25), that the death of the physical body is nothing but an onward step in our lives, that it does not change us in any way. If someone says to you, “I can't believe in a future life; no one has ever come back to tell us about it,” you can say, “But that isn't so: the Lord Jesus came back to tell us just that.” Anyone who calls himself a Christian knows this.

Where did the Lord say He would meet His disciples?

In the time of the Lord the Holy Land was divided into three provinces: Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. The Holy Land is a picture

of a heavenly character, and there are three divisions in this, too. Judea pictures our heart or will, Samaria our mind or understanding, and Galilee our outward conduct. So the Lord's words tell us that if we wish to come close to the Lord, we must not only mean well and think what is true but we must do what is right. And the place appointed by the Lord was on a mountain. You know that from a mountain we can look down on the land and see a long distance on all sides and see just how everything is located in relation to the whole view. So a mountain pictures a high or spiritual point of view. The Lord is close to us in our everyday life only if we are able to see that life from a high point of view. And His resurrection enables us to take this view of life because it shows us that our life here in this world is just the beginning of eternal life and that it is given us to use under the Lord's direction in such a way that our eternal life will be happy.

Forty days after the Lord's resurrection His ascension took place. Read the story of it in Luke 24:50-53. Even though we do not see the Lord with our physical eyes, He is with us always, as He promised. And we are called, just as the disciples were, to bring to other people the good news that God Himself came into the world in Jesus Christ to show us how to live and to teach us about heaven.

Intermediate

This is a brief lesson which lends itself to verse-by-verse explanation, especially through verse 10. The young people should be so familiar with the story itself that they should be very much interested in realizing that every detail has a correspondence relating to our ability to see living truth in the Word. Impress them with the idea that as long as we remain in mere knowledge of the letter of the Word, it is as if the Lord sleeps in the tomb, but when we begin to bring forth what we know and put it into use in loving service, the Lord rises and lives in us.

Just as we sometimes associate Christmas more with presents and decorations than with the church, so many associate Easter only with lilies and new spring clothes.

It is true that Easter always comes in the spring when we are rejoicing that winter is over and looking forward to the free outdoor life which comes with warmer weather. But no external enjoyment can be more than temporary, and we lose the whole importance of Easter if we do not see that it symbolizes an eternal springtime which we may enjoy if we recognize and accept the fact of the Lord's resurrection. Swedenborg tells us that in heaven it is always springtime (DLW 104). This is because there we shall be always going forward into new and fuller life and joy. When we depend on ourselves, we are always coming to the end of our powers. Our bodies grow old and wear out. Our minds reach their limits. Our good intentions are balked by ignorance and opposition. Only by means of the Lord's perpetual presence and help can we go steadily forward.

The women at the sepulchre recognized this. They had thought of the Lord as someone greater than themselves, but they had also loved Him as a man, as many people today still try to love Him. When they saw Him die on the cross and saw His body placed in the tomb they did not, as the disciples did, go back to their ordinary occupations. They stayed near the sepulchre and prepared spices to perform the last services for the body of the master they had loved. They represent our affections for truth, which cling to the thought of the Lord even when our minds are turned away by doubts. It is by means of these affections that the Lord can show Himself to us finally as He is. We must learn to put aside our childish ideas of Him as a man who long ago walked about the Holy Land performing miracles, and we must learn to see Him as our ever-present Lord and our all-powerful savior.

Our lesson tells of the measures which were taken first to prevent the resurrection and then, after it took place, to discredit it. This is what worldly reasoning tries to do in our minds. But the resurrection was a fact, a fact proved by the change it wrought in the apostles and by the change which belief in it accomplishes in every Christian life. It makes a great difference in our way of facing every problem of life whether we believe that this life is all there is

or believe that it is only the beginning of endless life. Not only death but life looks different.

The disciples met the Lord after His resurrection on a mountain in Galilee, we remember, pictures the plane of our outward life and a mountain pictures a high state of thinking. We must be able to lift our thoughts above our natural selfish concerns and to see our everyday life as an opportunity to serve the Lord and the neighbor. Then the Lord walks with us in everything we do. When the Lord told His disciples to meet Him in Galilee, He was telling us to carry His principles into everything we do from day to day. Then our lives, like the apostles, will carry the "good news" to others and help to establish heaven on earth.

Basic Correspondences

women = affections

a mountain = a high or spiritual point of view

Senior

Stress the fact that disbelief in the resurrection, an attitude which these young people will soon meet in the world, is willful—not logical or reasonable. Emphasize also that Easter should mean for us not only belief in a future life but also belief in the power of love over hate and truth over falsity in every problem of life. We really believe in the Lord only so far as we trust and obey Him. Trust and obedience are the measure of our faith, and they will be the measure of our spiritual success.

Each of the four Gospels gives us some different details of the Lord's trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. This is not strange, nor should it cause us to doubt any of them. If they were identical accounts, we might well say that one had copied from the other. Four witnesses to the same event will inevitably remember it differently. And we know also that in writing the Word the Lord directed the recollection of the human writers even to the very words they used, and that each Gospel had a sequence of its own important to the spiritual meaning.

In all the Gospels we learn that the first to discover the resurrec-

tion were the women who loved the Lord: Mary Magdalene, "out of whom he had cast seven devils," Mary the mother of James the Less, and Salome, the mother of James and John. They had remained near the tomb after it was closed. They picture our affections for truth which cling to the Lord even when external evidence leads us to doubt.

Many people in the world today are like these women who loved the Lord. They still cling to Him blindly and try to keep close to Him even when the Bible is a "sealed book" to their minds. The letter of the Word, when its spiritual sense is not known, is like the tomb with the great stone sealing it.

We cannot see the Lord as He is so long as we cling to the historical figure alone, a man who lived in Palestine hundreds of years ago. The historical Christ must burst the tomb of finite ideas in our minds and rise. Like the women when they saw Him risen, we must worship Him. We hold Him by the feet when we follow His example in our daily lives, but we must also see Him as our God who says to us, as to the disciples, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth," and "Lo, I am with you always."

The Lord told His disciples to meet Him in Galilee. Galilee means the plane of everyday life. We do not have to withdraw from the world to come close to the Lord. We have only to obey His commandments day by day. But this does not mean that we are necessarily close to the Lord if we do external "good works." The Pharisees did good works "to be seen of men." We read, "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them." If we are to meet the Lord in the plane of our everyday life, we must look at that life from the high place of His appointment. That is, we must see our everyday affairs as opportunities of serving Him and hold ourselves always subject to His direction. Only in this way will our lives be witnesses of Him.

Today, when Christianity is so often divorced from the Christ of the Gospels, it is well for us to remember that without Him we "can do nothing." Our own ideas of right and wrong are not Christianity. Christianity is a life according to the teachings of Christ,

and our only knowledge of those teachings is found in the inspired Word.

Isaiah says, "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6) This prophecy describes the way in which the Lord rose in the minds of those who loved Him when He was on earth, and the way in which He must rise in our minds.

Adult

Most of the Adults may already be sufficiently familiar with the details of the Easter story and their meaning, although the correspondence of the tomb and the stone that sealed it should be mentioned. Good discussion topics are the historical effect of the resurrection and its implications for the New Churchman especially.

The first ten verses of our chapter are very familiar to all of us. Most of us know them by heart. It is a simple, beautiful story. The sorrowing women come to the tomb to care for the body of their master and friend, upon whom they had counted so much and whose death seemed to them the end of everything. But instead of the sealed tomb guarded by soldiers, they find the tomb open and empty and an angel of glorious countenance in white raiment, who tells them to fear not for the Lord is risen and will come to them in Galilee. Then, as they run to tell the wonderful news to the disciples, they see the Lord Himself coming to meet them. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." This resurrection scene takes place "in the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week." Night always pictures a time of spiritual darkness and dawn the coming of a new spiritual day, a new state of recognition of the Lord. The sabbath of our first verse is not the holy sabbath of rest in the Lord, but the false sabbath of the religious leaders, the state of rest in the thought that they had triumphed by putting the Lord to death and would no more be troubled by Him. And the change is heralded by an earthquake, picturing a complete change in the state of the church.

The stone with which they had sealed the tomb represents their false interpretations of the letter of Scripture, by which they kept the people from seeing the spirit of truth within. False interpretations of the letter of the Word have not been confined to that day: they are prevalent today also and they still come between men and the Lord. The stone is rolled away when these false interpretations are given up and the Lord Himself is seen coming forth to reign and to bless.

The apostles were not the first at the sepulchre. In spite of all that the Lord had told them of His death and resurrection, they had given up hope when they saw Him die on the cross. But the women, who picture our affections, clung to the thought of the master even after His death and sought at the earliest opportunity—as soon as the sabbath was over—to serve Him still in the only way they thought remained to them. So our affections, even when hope seems dead, when the ideas of God in which we have trusted appear to be proved false, still cling to belief in the Lord Himself and seek to serve Him. And it is to this spirit of loving service that the Lord's resurrection is first declared. The keepers, who represent the false arguments in the mind which seek to keep the Lord in the tomb, to convince us that Christ is after all a mere historical figure, shake and become as dead men before the mighty truth of the resurrection. But this same truth encourages the loving affections and bids them instruct our thoughts and seek the Lord in the joy of willing service, in Galilee. We remember that Galilee pictures the plane of daily living and a mountain a high state of thought from which we can see our daily life in its true proportions and relationships. It is in carrying out the Lord's will in our daily life that we find His living spirit; without such active effort our knowledge of the Lord is dead. A similar truth is pictured by the fact that when the women actually saw the Lord, they "came and held him by the feet." The Lord's "feet" are the outmost plane of His activity, where His spirit affects our conduct.

The resurrection was the promised "sign of the prophet Jonas" (Matthew 16:4). The Lord rose on the third day, and between that

time and the ascension forty days later, He walked and talked with many, opening their spiritual eyes to see Him.

But those whose spiritual eyes were closed by willful blindness did not see Him. That the apostles did see Him is proved by the effect on their lives. They had deserted Him when He was on the cross; they withdrew to mourn and wonder and doubt, as we see by the conversation described in Luke 24:13-21, and even the report of the women failed to convince them (Mark 16:10-11, Luke 24:10-11). But when they saw Him themselves, their whole life was changed; they then recalled and believed all He had told them of Himself, and were ready to go forth and suffer martyrdom for their belief in Him. Moreover their belief was so sure that they were able to convince others and to found the Christian Church. The very existence of the Christian Church is ample evidence of the fact of the resurrection. And the spirit of the glorified Lord working through the lives of those who accept Him has changed the course of history and brought about a new type of civilization. There is no logical reason to doubt that the resurrection was a fact.

If we accept the fact of the resurrection, we must believe, as the apostles did, that the Lord told the truth about Himself, that He is God with us, and that His Word is binding upon us. In the resurrection He gave the world a single great sign which stands for all time as proof of His claims and of His power. Belief in the resurrection entails upon us the responsibility of studying the Lord's teaching and obeying it, giving up our own judgment when we see that it is contrary to His teaching. This is the difficult side of the acceptance. But there is another and very joyous and beautiful side which we always have especially in mind on Easter Sunday. The Lord rose not only to prove to us that He is God, "the resurrection and the life," but to prove that His power is always victorious in the long run, that, whatever the appearance may be, falsity and evil always fail in the end. "Fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." If we will adopt the principles of love to the Lord and the neighbor as our ruling principles and act

steadfastly from them, nothing can harm us spiritually; everything that happens to us in this world, however hard and disastrous it may seem outwardly, will be turned by the Lord into a means of developing fuller and happier life; our lives, no matter how humble and circumscribed they may seem, will advance the kingdom of heaven on earth. And when life here is over, when the evil forces of worldliness and selfishness have done their worst, we shall merely discard the outworn garment which served us so imperfectly and rise to full life and freedom in the spiritual world. The resurrection shows us death as the gateway to life; it enables us to live in the certainty of eternal values.

And the resurrection teaches us another lesson. The Lord is always with us although our physical eyes cannot see Him. He is not far away in heaven, indifferent to our struggles and needs. He is always at the door, waiting to come in when we open to Him. He is nearer to us than any earthly friend we have. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He is always ready to listen and not only willing but able to help us, if only we will trust Him and accept His advice. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." He says this to us. And He tells us, as He told the apostles, to go out in the strength of this knowledge and spread the gospel of the kingdom. What we need to remember is that the Gospel is His, not ours—the truth as we find it in the Word, not our own ideas of what the truth ought to be. Again and again we are told in the writings that the Lord's spirit cannot act through falsity. Our church can succeed in the world and in our individual lives only so far as it is truly Christian, so far as it opens the way for the Lord's presence and power by seeking Him in His Word and obeying the truth as He speaks it there.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 2405: Concerning the correspondence of *dawn*: "As in the proper sense the 'morning' signifies the Lord, His advent, and thus the

approach of His kingdom, it is evident what it signifies besides, namely, the rise of a new church (for this is the Lord's kingdom on earth), and this both in general and in particular; in general, when any church on the globe is being raised up anew; in particular, when a man is being regenerated, and being made new (for then the Lord's kingdom is arising in him, and he is becoming a church); and in the least particular, whenever the good of love and faith is working in him; for in this consists the advent of the Lord. Hence the Lord's resurrection on the third day in the morning involves all these things (even in the particular and least particular) in regard to His rising again in the minds of the regenerate every day, and even every moment."

Arcana Coelestia, nn. 10591-10595: "Man has been so created that he cannot die in respect to his Internal, because he is able to believe in God and also to love God, and thus to be conjoined with God in faith and love; and to be conjoined with God is to live forever. This Internal is in every man who is born. His External is that by means of which he brings into effect the things that belong to faith and love, thus that belong to the Internal. The Internal is what is called the 'soul,' and the External is what is called the 'body.' The external which man carries about in the world has been accommodated to uses in the world. This external is what is laid aside when the man dies; but the external which has been accommodated to uses in the other life does not die. This latter external together with the internal is called a 'spirit'; a good spirit and an angel if the man has been good in the world; and an evil spirit if he has been evil. In the other life the spirit of man appears in the human form absolutely as in the world. He also enjoys the capability of thinking, of willing, and of acting, as in the world. In a word, he is a man in respect to each and all things, except that he is not encompassed with that gross body with which he was encompassed in the world. This leaves behind when he dies, nor does he ever resume it. It is this continuation of life which is meant by Resurrection. . . ."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. What day is today? *Easter Sunday*
- P. Why do we observe Easter? *to remember Christ's resurrection*
- J. Why did the people turn against the Lord so soon after they welcomed Him as king? *they listened to the jealous religious leaders*
- J. Why did the Lord come into the city again on Thursday evening? *to eat the Passover*
- J. On what day of the week was the Lord crucified? *Friday*
- J. What do we call that day in Holy Week? *Good Friday [“Good” in the sense of, “a day or season observed as holy by the church.” —OED]*

- J. What was done with the Lord's body after the crucifixion? *laid in a new tomb*
- P. Who came to the sepulchre on the first Easter morning? *the women*
- P. What did they find? *open tomb*
- P. What did the angel tell them? *He is risen*
- J. Where did the angel tell them the Lord would meet the disciples? *Galilee*
- P. As they went away, who met them? *Jesus*
- J. How did the religious leaders try to discredit the fact of the resurrection? *bribed guards to lie*
- P. What does the Lord's resurrection teach us? *after death we will live again*
- J. When Jesus met the disciples in Galilee, what did He first say about Himself? "*All power is given unto me . . .*"
- J. What did He tell them to do? *make disciples, baptize*
- J. What was His final encouragement to them? "*I am with you always*"
- I. Why did the Lord tell the disciples to meet Him on a mountain in Galilee?
Galilee = outer, everyday life
mountain = high state of thinking
- S. Why were the women the first to learn of the resurrection? *our affections for truth persist even when external evidence would seem to demand doubt*

APPENDIX

The theological assertion concerning inherited tendencies (p. 252) may well be the most troublesome in all of Swedenborg. As early as 1740, Swedenborg in *EAK* 2, n. 295, asserted that “the soul is not derived from the mother,” at which point the translator noted that Aristotle maintained the same doctrine in *De Generat. Animal.*, book 2, chapter 4. Swedenborg was well read in Aristotle.

In the posthumously published treatise known as *Generation* [1742-43], Swedenborg begins chapter 18 (n. 354) by stating: “From remote antiquity to the present day there has been controversy among the learned as to what the father contributes to the life of the offspring, and what the mother . . .” In n. 358 he attributes “principles” (beginnings) to the father and “principiates” (derivatives) to “the soul of the embryo and the soul of the mother conjointly.

In *DP* [1764], n. 277³, the statement that “everyone’s soul is from the father, and from the mother it is merely clothed with a body” is followed closely by an erroneous analogy involving offspring of mixed black and white parentage.

One should also read with care nn. 202, 206, and 238 of *CL* [1768], before passing final judgment on this matter.

Finally, the statement in *TCR* [1771] at n. 103 would seem to validate fully the assertion cited above. At the end, speaking of the Lord, it states that “He put off by the acts of redemption, everything of the human from the mother, and put on a Human from the Father . . .” The problem with this is that if this means He literally put off *everything* he derived from the mother, one has to wonder why He took on the maternal human at all. It is a cardinal teaching of the New Church that the Divine Human is the unique outcome of the processes of incarnation and glorification. Surely *something* of the maternal heredity was interwoven in that unfathomable consequence.

Elsewhere, the patent ineffability of such a doctrine seems implicit in the wording that “until He had put it off and made it Divine, the human that appertained to the Lord was merely a servant.” (AC 2159) This translation seems correctly to reflect the Latin, leaving one to ponder how a human can be put off *and* made divine.

The plea being entered here is that we not treat such statement as unambiguous and self-validating doctrinal assertions, thus lending themselves to extrapolations that must perforce follow. In our statement of faith we declare: “He glorified his Humanity, uniting it with the Divinity of which it was begot-

ten." And while we cannot hope to all eternity to understand *how* He glorified his humanity, there seems to be good reason to infer that the glorified humanity retained some basic relationship to the assumed humanity, despite the several *apparently* unequivocal statements, such as *TCR* 102, that "by the acts of redemption He put off the human from the mother and put on a Human from the Father." —*Ed.*

