

WHAT IS HEAVEN LIKE?



Bird's Eye View of Lesson

Emanuel Swedenborg witnessed the lives of angels in the spiritual world under the Lord's direction. The book *Heaven and Hell* unveils the similarities and differences between life on earth and life in heaven, describing in detail the heavens and the lives of angels. The Lord wants each person to become an angel and enter heaven after death. We can become angels by learning truths from the Word and then using these truths as the spiritual guideposts of our lives.

READINGS FROM THE WORD

What is heaven like? Who can go to heaven? Look for answers to these questions in today's lesson.

The Kingdom of Heaven

Jesus told many parables about the kingdom of heaven to help people understand what heaven is like and who will feel at home there. In one parable we learn that people in the kingdom of heaven value following the Lord's commandments rather than breaking His laws.

"Whoever...breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19).

The Lord also offered this insight into who is considered great in heaven:

"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:1-4).

"To be converted and become as little children" indicates that we must look to the Lord with humility in our hearts, recognizing that we need Him to lead us and take care of us. This is the innocence of wisdom that the angels have. The Lord knows that this will not be easy for us, because we love our freedom and independence. But in the long run, we will actually become more free when we look to the Lord and love what is good. It is evil that enslaves us rather than good.



WHAT IS HEAVEN LIKE?

Becoming an Angel

Imagine living in a place where everyone looks to the Lord and wants to make others happy. That is the reality of life in heaven because angels are human beings who love the Lord and other people more themselves. They made choices during their lives on earth that confirmed these loves again and again. They obeyed the Lord's commandments, and they loved doing what is good. After death, they woke up in the world of spirits ready to be prepared for life in heaven. The Lord promises a heavenly life after death to people of all faiths who choose this path.

What Is Heaven Like?

Emanuel Swedenborg witnessed the wonders of heaven. He saw beautiful landscapes, houses, and gardens. All of the animals there were gentle or useful, such as horses, sheep, deer, doves, and swans (see *True Christian Religion* 78). He found that everything good that is in the natural world is also found in heaven, but there it is much more perfect (see *True Christian Religion* 794). And everything he saw there was bathed in the brilliant light of heaven. This light is from the Lord who is seen as the spiritual Sun by the angels.

What Do Angels Do?

Many people think of heaven as a place of eternal rest. The angels experience great peace and joy in their heavenly lives, however their lives are also very active. They worship the Lord, read the Word, and talk with friends about the spiritual things—but that is just the beginning. Every angel engages in useful service within their community. In fact, the Heavenly Doctrine tells us that being useful is paramount for heavenly happiness.

The angels in heaven have all happiness from uses, and according to uses, so that to them uses are heaven (*Arcana Coelestia* 7038).

Because the Lord gives each person a unique array of gifts, each angel has something special to contribute to the variety of heaven. Angels also relax together. They have fun playing sports, putting on dramatic performances, playing music, and celebrating special events.

Angelic Clothing

Angels have fine garments that convey the extent of their intelligence. Some angels appear to have stars encircling their heads. Angels are often pictured with wings but do not actually have them. They appear like people here on earth except that they are all youthful, handsome, and healthy.

Angels are clothed according to their intelligence or the Divine truth with them. The garments of some [angels] blaze as if with flame and those of others glisten as if with light. Some have garments that are glistening white and others have garments of various colors (see *Heaven and Hell* 179).

Angelic clothing changes when their inner state changes (*Heaven and Hell* 181). And there seem to be occasions—such as weddings—for which people are given special garments.

WHAT IS HEAVEN LIKE?



Surprising Things About Heaven

Everyone in heaven speaks a common language that all others can understand, no matter what languages they spoke in the world. Angels can also listen to the tone of voice and know what the speaker loves, and by listening to the articulation angels can understand another person's inner thoughts (*Heaven and Hell* 234-245).

Another difference is that in heaven there are no days, seasons, or years as we experience them in the natural world. Instead, the angels experience varying states of love, and these variations appear like "days" and "seasons." So when the states of angels change, the things around them appear to change too, reflecting their loves and thoughts (*Heaven and Hell* 158, 164).

Another amazing thing about heaven is that things appear to be in a place and in a space, but a person's location can seem to change without him going anywhere—depending on his state of mind. It is similar to the way a person's thoughts can wander while he or she is sitting still. For example, people who want to see each other and are in a similar state will appear to be close to each other. But people whose thoughts disagree and who love different things might become invisible to each other (see *Heaven and Hell* 192, 194).

Angelic Homes and Communities

Angels are married, living as husband and wife in their own homes. Each home is uniquely suited to the couple and made of materials—wood, stone, precious metals, gems—that symbolize what they love. These homes range from a tent or tabernacle on a mountain to a magnificent palace. Even the gardens are amazing, with leaves that glisten as if they were made of silver, fruit that appears to be made of gold, and rainbows of color in the flower beds (see *Heaven and Hell* 185).

The houses in which angels dwell are not erected, as houses in the world are, but are given to them gratuitously by the Lord, to every one in accordance with his reception of good and truth. They also change a little in accordance with changes of the state of interiors of the angels. Every thing whatsoever that the angels possess they hold as received from the Lord; and every thing they have need of is given them (*Heaven and Hell* 190).

There are communities of people who have similar loves, but differ as to their wisdom. Communities vary in size—some being as large as hundreds of thousands of people (*Heaven and Hell* 213). Each angelic community has its own unique function within the kingdom of heaven—educating children, welcoming newcomers, watching over people in the world, restraining evil spirits, or another essential use (*Heaven and Hell* 391). There is an amazing variety of uses in heaven, and the angels experience immense joy in serving others.

Every society of heaven increases in number daily,
and as it increases it becomes more perfect (*Heaven and Hell* 71).



FOCUS POINTS

Circle T for True or F for False for each of the following statement. Discuss your answers.

1. T F Angels are people who lived on earth.
2. T F People have sometimes seen angels.
3. T F Only people who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ can go to heaven.
4. T F It doesn't matter how I live my life. As long as I believe in the Lord, I will go to heaven.
5. T F Heaven is a state of eternal rest and peace.
6. T F Communities in heaven consist of people who love the same kinds of things.
7. T F All of the angels in heaven wear long white robes.
8. T F It doesn't matter what I believe. As long as I live a good life, I can go to heaven.
9. T F Angels live as married couples in heaven.
10. T F I will choose my home in heaven.
11. T F Angels enjoy lives of useful service.
12. T F You don't have to be married to go to heaven.
13. T F If I go to heaven, I will live there to eternity.
14. T F The purpose of the human race is so that there can be a heaven.
15. T F Angels are happy all of the time.
16. T F Only people who believe in the New Church to go to heaven.
17. T F The Lord is in heaven.
18. T F To go to heaven a person must resist loving themselves and worldly things the most.
19. T F I am building my house in heaven now as I live each day here on earth.

THREE HEAVENS



Heaven itself is divided into three different heavens. There is an inmost or third heaven, a middle or second heaven, and an outmost or first heaven.

These are interdependent, like the highest part of the human body, the head; the middle, or torso; and the lowest, or feet. Or like the highest, middle and lowest parts of a house (see *Heaven and Hell* 29).

Three Heavens—Three Fundamental Loves

The angels in each of the three heavens are moved by three fundamental kinds of love. In the inmost or celestial heaven the angels are deeply affected when they learn the Lord's truth, and they put it right into action in their lives. In the spiritual heaven, the angels love to learn and think about the truth, and then commit it to action in their lives. The angels in the outmost or natural heaven care most about leading moral lives, and are not as interested in learning the truth.

Those who are affected by Divine truths and admit them at once into their life—into their will and thence into action—are in the inmost or third heaven. Those who do not admit truths at once into the will but into the memory and then into the understanding, and from this, will and do them, are in the middle or second heaven. Those who live morally and believe in a Divine Being, but do not care greatly about being taught, are in the outermost or first heaven (see *Heaven and Hell* 33).

We cannot know for certain what basic love is at the center of our life. But by reflecting on our lives and discovering what brings us the most delight we may glimpse what is at the heart of what we truly love (see *Heaven and Hell* 486). Remember that people are free to change their loves until they die.

A Look at What Delights

Look at the following list of activities and think about the disposition of people who love them. Categorize these by the loves of the celestial, spiritual and natural heavens. Some activities may belong in more than one category. (Use the column under the ? to write C, S, and/or N to stand for the different heavens.)

?	Activity	?	Activity
	going to church and hearing the Word read		standing up against a crowd for what's right
	helping someone because you're told it's the right thing to do		recognizing that everything you do is really being done by the Lord through you
	giving another person something you really love or want		seeing someone in need of help and immediately helping them
	praising another person		playing games by the rules
	listening to someone's problems		helping a stranger
	having a religious conversation		teaching someone about the Lord
	seeing someone who needs help, but weighing whether it is really the most useful thing to be doing with your time		telling someone when they are making a bad choice



THE GRAND HUMAN

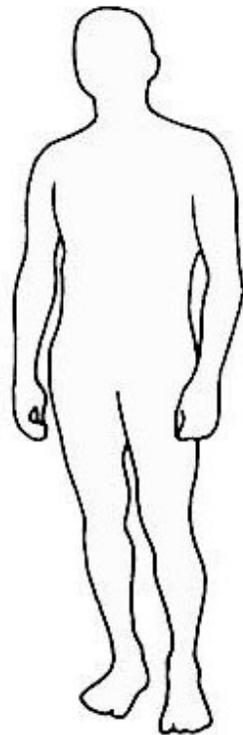
Activity 2

Heaven in its whole complex resembles one human being. Since the angels know that all the heavens with their societies resemble one person they therefore call heaven the Grand and Divine Human (see *Heaven and Hell* 59).

In general, the highest or third heaven forms the head down to the neck, the middle or second heaven forms the breast down to the loins and knees, the lowest or first heaven forms the feet down to the soles and also the arms down to the fingers, for the arms and hands are the ultimates of a person, although at the sides (*Heaven and Hell* 65).

Angels live in heavenly communities. When seen together, these communities form one Human—the Grand Human of heaven. Each angelic community functions as a whole, in a similar way to the organs of the human body, which function together as a whole person. Each angel in a community performs a specific useful service in a similar way to each cell in a bodily organ.

The Heavenly Doctrine gives an overview of the angelic societies that make up the various organs of the Grand Human of heaven. Use the information provided with this activity to label the diagram of the Grand Human with the corresponding heavenly societies.



THE GRAND HUMAN



Use the information provided in this abbreviated concordance to label the diagram of the Grand Man with the communities of heaven that are associated with organs and parts of the body. To explore more ideas, go to www.heavenlydoctrines.org.

Arms	Those in the arms and hands (in the Grand Man) are in the power of truth from good (<i>Heaven and Hell</i> 96).
Breast	Angels that are in the breast are in the good of charity and of faith, and these flow into the breast of a person and correspond to it (<i>Heaven and Hell</i> 96).
Ears	People who are obedient and in faith from their obedience belong to the province of the ear (<i>Arcana Coelestia</i> 3869). The spirits who correspond to hearing, or who constitute the province of the ear, are people who are in simple obedience. They do not reason whether it is so, but believe it to be so because it is said to be so by others (<i>Arcana Coelestia</i> 4653).
Eyes	People who are at the eyes are people who are intelligent and wise (<i>Arcana Coelestia</i> 4523).
Feet	People who correspond to the feet, soles and heels in the Grand Man are people who are natural. Therefore 'feet' in the Word correspond to natural things, 'the soles,' lower natural things, and 'the heels,' the lowest natural things. For the celestial things in the Grand Man constitute the head, the spiritual things the body, and the natural things the feet (<i>Arcana Coelestia</i> 4938). Those in the feet are in the lowest good of heaven, which is called spiritual natural good (<i>Heaven and Hell</i> 96).
Head	The inmost heaven relates to the head (<i>Arcana Coelestia</i> 5328). The universal heaven before the Lord is as One Man, in which they who are in the Divine celestial of the Lord make the head (<i>Apocalypse Revealed</i> 49:2).
Hand	They who are in the arms and hands are in the power of truth from good (<i>Heaven and Hell</i> 96:2).
Heart	People who are in love to the Lord, and are called the celestial, in the Grand Man or Heaven constitute the province of the heart (<i>Arcana Coelestia</i> 9050:2).
Kidneys	People in the kidneys are in truths searching, separating, and correcting (<i>Heaven and Hell</i> 96).
Loins	In the Greatest Man, or heaven, those that are in the loins and the organs devoted to generation are in marriage love (<i>Heaven and Hell</i> 96).
Lungs	The societies in heaven which belong to the lungs are spiritual ones, and are round about, and are in the exteriors (<i>Arcana Coelestia</i> 3890). People who are in faith in the Lord, and from that in charity towards the neighbor, constitute the providence of the lungs in heaven (<i>Arcana Coelestia</i> 9050:2).
Neck	The neck, from correspondence, is the medium which unites the inmost and the middle heaven (<i>Arcana Coelestia</i> 10005:4).
Nose	People in the nostrils are in perception (<i>Heaven and Hell</i> 96).



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CHILDREN DIE?

Activity 3

Every child, wherever he is born, whether within the church or outside of it, whether of pious parents or impious, is received when he dies by the Lord and trained up in heaven, and taught in accordance with Divine order, and imbued with affections for what is good, and through these with knowledges of what is true. Afterwards as he is perfected in intelligence and wisdom is introduced into heaven and becomes an angel (*Heaven and Hell* 329).

As soon as little children are resuscitated (which takes place immediately after death), they are taken into heaven and given to angel women who in the life of the body tenderly loved little children and at the same time loved God. Since in this world they had loved all children with a kind of motherly tenderness, they receive them as their own, and the children love them as their own mothers as though this were inborn in them. Each such angel has as many children as her spiritual maternal nature wants. All little children are under the immediate auspices of the Lord (see *Heaven and Hell* 332).

Children who die are brought up in heaven by angel parents. They are educated by their parents and, as they grow up, by teachers. When they reach adulthood, they become angels (*Heaven and Hell* 330, 334). Special care is taken with their education, and they are gently led to resist what is evil and love what is good.

Choose one of the following activities:

Design a Heavenly Bedroom, Garment or Garden

Spiritual Experiences 5660-5665 by Emanuel Swedenborg, describes how girls are raised in heaven. (To find these passages, you may use www.heavenlydoctrines.org.) Use the descriptions given here to design a heavenly bedroom, garment, or garden.

Heavenly Games and Sports

Children growing up in heaven play sports and games. Make up a game that emphasizes heavenly values, such as cooperation, mutual aid, having a useful goal. List any rules you think are important. Or, think about a sport or game you play and make up a set of heavenly rules for it.

Plays and Representations

Dramatize a story in the Word that could be acted out. Use www.biblegateway.com to access the text and turn it into a play.

As an alternative, you could design a puppet, doll or do a painting that depicts a heavenly truth, e.g. marriage, the Lord as the center and sun of heaven, the Lord's resurrection (see *Heaven and Hell* 335). To keep this activity simple, you can conceptualize what you would like to make, or if time permits, you can go ahead and develop your idea more fully.

TAKING IT HOME



Here are a variety of activities that can help you bring this lesson into your life.

Ideas for Journal Entries *(choose one)*

- Imagine that you are a disciple of the Lord being sent to teach people about the kingdom of heaven. What can you tell people about heaven?
- How can you use the parables and other teachings to give others a clear idea of heaven?

For Reflection

- Think about a recent conversation you have had with someone that may have left you feeling unhappy about what was said, or something you have done in the past that you feel may have been a poor choice. Reflect on what evils may have prompted your actions. Make a plan to avoid the evils in the future and to change the outcome if a similar situation comes up again. Make a choice for heaven today!
- Does the Lord help people get to heaven, or do people have to get there on their own? How can you find and use the Lord's help today?

Spiritual Task

by the Rev. David Roth

Everyone Can Go to Heaven

(Divine Providence 330)

Story The Writings for the New Church teach very clearly that any individual that lives in the good of charity according to his or her religion is going to heaven. “Heaven is such a place that all who live well, of whatever religion they may be, have a place there.”

Meaning What causes people and religions and churches to be divided is focusing on ideas, opinions, and doctrinal differences rather than on what all those things lead to, which is, love to the Lord and love toward the neighbor. The Lord teaches that all churches would be one if charity were made the most important thing.

Task This week observe how you react inside or outside when you meet or have a discussion with someone who has different beliefs and ideas than you. Is there a feeling of restriction in your chest? Do you immediately try to change their minds? Do you tell them they are misled? Instead of looking for differences, look for common ground. And try saying to yourself, “This person is a child of God. The Lord loves them as much as He loves me or anyone else on this planet. Lord open my eyes so I may see Your life and goodness flowing through them.”

Further Reading

HEAVEN, A PLACE TO GET INTO?

by the Rev. Kurt P. Nemitz

Heaven! What a wonderful thing it would be to come to heaven—for some people. Here is a true story, from the Heavenly Doctrines, about a man who had died and wanted to come to heaven. But he found out that coming to heaven was not as happy for him as he imagined it would be. In this story we hear him telling some other newcomers to the spiritual world about what happened to him after he got into heaven. He said to them:

“When I first came into the spiritual world, I asked some wise angels I met there if a person would be allowed to come up to heaven. They said that everyone was allowed to come up to heaven, but added that a person should be careful; he might throw himself down from there. I laughed at this and went up. I believed that it is possible for everybody in the whole world to enjoy heaven completely. But the truth is that as soon as I was in heaven, I almost lost my breath. And on account of the pain and torment in my body I threw myself down on the ground, and I was writhing like a snake laid right in front of a fire. To get away from it I crawled up a steep cliff and threw myself over it. Some people who were standing around below then picked me up and carried me to an inn, where I came to my senses” (*Conjugial Love* 10:5).

This man learned the hard way that heaven is not something a person can simply go to and be happy the way a person can go to a party or a vacation place and find happiness in just being there.

The angels made this truth very clear to him and to some other newcomers to the spiritual world who were listening to his story. “You can see now,” one of the angels said, “that the joys of heaven and its eternal happiness are not the joys that come from a place, but from the way people think and feel, from their state of mind.” The angel then went on to explain that everyone who becomes an angel carries their heaven already within them from earth when they die and pass over into the spiritual world. It is just as the Lord taught when He was on earth and said, “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). By the kingdom of God He meant heaven.

How Is Heaven in a Person?

What exactly is it that makes the “kingdom of God,” be within a person? The answer is that it is the presence of the Lord’s love. The Lord’s love, you see, is love for others, it is a deep desire to bless them and make them truly happy. If we have the Lord’s love in us, we will try to make others happy. And when we do this we feel their happiness as if it is our own. You know how this is. For example, have you ever tried to make a little baby happy? When you succeed and the baby’s face lights up with smile, doesn’t that make

you feel happy too? Feeling happiness in this way is how angels feel happiness. They feel happy when they see others feeling happy from the things they do for them. This is Heaven.

How Heaven Feels to People Who Do Not Have Heavenly Love in Them

From the newcomer's story we see how people in the spiritual world feel when they visit heaven but do not have the Lord's love for others within themselves. When he came into heaven the feelings in his heart clashed with the warmth of the angels' caring love for others. He felt like a snake laid near a fire. From this story we can see that in the other world happiness—or unhappiness—do not come from a place, that is to say, from simply being in a place. The happiness that makes heaven “heavenly” actually comes from the heartfelt desire to do good things for others—because you love them.

Heaven Is a Beautiful State of Mind and so a Beautiful Place

As the angel explained, heaven for a person is primarily a state of mind; it is not simply a place. Nevertheless heaven does look like a place, and a wonderful one too. Heaven looks quite like the world on earth that the people who are now angels left when they died, only everything in heaven looks much, much more beautiful.

The Lord's loving goodness in the angels is always making everything around them indescribably beautiful. It is like what happens at a wedding, because there is so much love there, everyone involved in preparing for it tries to make it as lovely as possible. Through His goodness the Lord creates beautiful surroundings for the angels. For example, the angels have beautiful homes, which are designed and provided by Him to suit their needs and personalities. He also sets their communities in lovely landscapes of mountains and valleys, fields and forests, gardens and orchards. All the things around the angels are pictures of the Lord's loving goodness that they have gratefully made a place for in their hearts. But although the angels appreciate and enjoy their beautiful homes and everything else in heaven that the Lord has given them, these are not the chief source of their happiness. As far as angels are concerned, all of these beautiful things simply make a nice place for them to live while they are doing caring, useful things to help others be happy.

Heaven's Joy Is Unselfish Useful Activity

Unselfish love and useful activity is what makes heaven a happy kingdom. “The extent of heaven's joy,” we are told in the Heavenly Doctrines, “can be judged simply from the fact that everyone there takes delight in sharing his own delight and blessedness with someone else. And since everyone in heaven is like that, you can see how vast heaven's delight is. For in heaven there is a sharing by all with each individual and by each individual with all” (*Heaven and Hell* 399).