

TEACHING THE WAY TO HEAVEN

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Readings: Revelation 21:1-7, Arcana Coelestia 1, 2 and 3

Imagine, if you can, children, what life was like for those people that the Lord first created on this earth. They were similar to us in many ways. Babies were born and cared for by their mothers and fathers. Children had to learn many things as they were growing up, just as you do today. They were loved by their parents and trained to become angels in heaven.

But their life was different from yours in many ways. They did not have the modern conveniences that you enjoy, such as radio, television, cars and airplanes, and they were trained for heaven in an entirely different way. Parents and children did not have to go to the Lord's Word and read about heaven. They were allowed to look into heaven and be taught by angels. In those days, which were known as the Golden Age, there were no evil spirits in hell trying to make people be bad. Imagine how wonderful that would be! Everything they learned was true. Everything they did was good—to the neighbor and to the Lord—and everyone went to heaven.

We should understand, however, that not everyone had to go to heaven. They were free not to if they so wished. But they could see how wonderful heaven was; so of course everyone wanted to go there.

Sad to say, however, some people thought that they could find happiness without the Lord's help. They foolishly thought that they could be happier by serving themselves rather than the neighbor. This led, eventually, to selfishness and the beginning of evil. The Lord had to change His way of teaching people about heaven. No one could learn how to become an angel by talking directly to angels anymore. So the Lord had people write down rules for getting to heaven, carefully contained within simple stories. We still have some of those stories in the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis.

Many people continued thinking that they could be happy without following the rules the Lord had given them. Selfish people would read the Lord's Word (called the Ancient Word) and only see the stories, without the meanings contained within them. And so the Lord had to find another way to tell people how to get to heaven.

He called a great Jewish leader, named Moses, up on to a mountain and gave him, in a very simple form, the rules of heaven. He Himself carved them in a stone. They were called The Ten Commandments. He also gave Moses many

other rules for the people to follow. And, for awhile, the Children of Israel did obey His Commandments, and found the Lord leading them to their Promised Land across the river Jordan. But eventually, as had happened before, the people misunderstood His rules, and other ways had to be found to instruct them. From time to time in the years that followed, the Lord would call on special people to speak His rules. Such men were called prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. Their words were written down and gathered together in what we call today the Old Testament. But still there were evil people who turned their backs on the Lord's teachings.

Finally, the Lord came on earth to speak to people Himself. He came in a body of one called Jesus Christ, the Son of Mary. When Jesus grew up, He went about the Land of Canaan and told people, once again, the rules for becoming an angel in heaven. He performed many miracles to show that He was different from anyone else. There were many who believed Him, and wrote down His words as well as describing what He did. We have this written account in what we call the New Testament. But there were many, even when He was on earth, that did not believe His words. He tried to show people that there is a life after death by rising from the grave, after they put His body to death. We celebrate that occasion every year at Easter time.

But as the years went on, people continued to twist His words in the New Testament so that His simple rules could no longer be seen as true.

The Lord, Who knows all things, could see that this would happen again. He still wanted all people to be happy to eternity. But they had to know how to prepare themselves while on earth. So once again He called on someone living in the world to speak the rules that lead to happiness. He prepared a man called Emanuel Swedenborg for this important work. Then, when the time was ready, He let Swedenborg's spiritual eyes be opened so that he, like those living in that earliest Golden Age, could look into heaven and talk to angels. This man wrote down exactly what the Lord told him to write, and then had him print many copies of his writings and spread them around to others. The Lord told Swedenborg many secrets about heaven and how angels are prepared to dwell there, while on this earth. These books, which we call the Writings, have since been translated into many languages and spread around the whole world. The people who have read these books and hear the Lord speaking to them the words of truth have gathered together to form a church. Ministers have been trained to teach heavenly secrets to others. So now the rules for going to heaven are again available to all people.

To remind us of this wonderful miracle of how the Lord once again gave us the rules to heaven, we in the Church stop once a year and have a celebration. This celebration is called New Church Day, a festival when those people who have heard the words of the Lord speaking to them through the Writings of our Church stop to thank the Lord for this wonderful gift. Your parents hope and

pray that you, too, will hear the Lord speaking to you about the rules for going to heaven. The Lord has given them to us in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, and now in the Writings of our Church. *Amen.*