

## **YEARS HAVE THEIR BEGINNINGS**

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*Lessons: Deuteronomy 28:1-20; Luke 3:1-10;  
The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine 164*

Many lessons can be learned by reviewing the past. This is evident from the Word. For example, Deuteronomy is a review of the forty years spent by the Israelites in the wilderness. The book consists of seven addresses to the people made by Moses within a period of forty days. In those addresses Moses recalls the mercies which the Lord had bestowed on the people and on their forefathers from their departure out of Egypt. He reminds them of their disobedience, their ingratitude, and their punishments. He repeats many of the laws given by the Lord, explains them, and enforces his explanations with every variety of argument and motive. In the Lord's name, he promises national and personal prosperity, happiness and honor for obedience; and foretells miseries, plagues, captivities and oppression for disobedience.

The Old Testament has many, similar reviews. Prophets made these over more than a thousand years. They were exhortations to repentance and righteousness, which were possible only when there was knowledge of the past and, by a comparison of it with the present, a realization of their disobedience.

It should be evident that we also need to review the past, and the end of the year is a fitting time for such a review. Much can be learned from worldly events, for in them we can see reflected our own states. Also much can be learned by a person's reviewing his own life during the past year and years.

But years have their beginnings as well as their endings. Life, in fact, has endless new beginnings. After death there is the continuation of life. In respect to a person, "As the tree falls, so shall it lie; as the man lives, so shall he die; as the man dies, so shall he be all through the days of eternity." For in the spiritual world, after death, we cannot make the same kind of new beginnings that are possible on earth. Here we can repent, and begin anew. This is another reason why the past is preserved in many ways, and why the future is forecasted. Though we really can live only in the present, yet the past provides the means for such life. Try to imagine life without anything from the past! There would be no progress. There could be no hope of anything in the future.

But we are not to be always making new beginnings, for then there would be no order and stability. There is always the possibility of making new beginnings; but the truth leads in constant ways, and to enduring good states. We see the application of this truth especially to religion, to belief in a God and

in the Lord Jesus Christ as God, to the eternal character of charity and good will, to marriage. Unless people are constant in these things, and in these states, also in their agreements and promises, they have no reliability and cannot be trusted. The new beginnings here are essentially those that follow repentance of evil, and the productions from new seeds of truth sown by the Lord in the ever widening ground of a regenerating person's good.

In all of these states—in our own and in those of other people—we should ever look for the overruling government of the Lord. We can see His government—the Divine Providence—only in the past; and we can see it best as it is shown in the Divine story of the Israelites and of the nations surrounding them. This is one reason for using the letter of the Word as true history and as the container of the internal sense.

At this time of self-examination with its conclusions and judgments and of thought about the future with its innumerable hopes and promises let us weigh well the following simple and direct statements from the *True Christian Religion* 652:

The word which will judge means truth; and it is a truth that all evil is from hell, and so evil and hell are one. When therefore a wicked person is raised by the Lord towards heaven, then his evil drags him down, and because he loves evil, he follows of his own accord. It is also a truth contained in the Word that good is heaven. When therefore the good person is raised by the Lord towards heaven, he climbs up as if of his own accord, and is brought inside. These are said to be written in the Book of Life. . . . There is actually a sphere elevating all to heaven, which continually proceeds from the Lord and fills the spiritual world and the natural world. It is like a strong current in the ocean, which invisibly draws a ship along. All who believe in the Lord and live according to His commandments enter that sphere or current, and are raised up. But those who do not believe are unwilling to enter, but take themselves off to one side or the other, and are there swept away by the stream which leads to hell.

The assurance of this sphere of Providence, and of the Lord's constant government and mercies, should fill us with courage and joy. It means that good and truth will prevail on earth as in heaven. But this assurance does not allow any man or woman to cease from strenuous efforts to live the truth, to keep the Lord's Commandments, and to follow Him in the way to heaven. It does not allow any complacency and irresponsibility. On the contrary, it shows the need for every one to do all that which is within his ability and opportunities to cooperate with the Lord, for the sake of mankind, and so for his own redemption and salvation. As every one does his part, there will be received and enjoyed the innumerable blessings the Lord so bountifully provides for His children. *Amen.*